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Violence against women in politics and public life, democratic backsliding, and far-right politics[1]

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* The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations.

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[1] This is a work in progress, I present these ideas for discussion. Comments are welcome, I am certain that they will contribute to the development of the arguments in this paper.

Introduction

Violence affects women in politics and in public life worldwide, conforming and limiting their action (Krook, 2018). These effects vary according to the structures of oppression and patterns of political conflict. Race, ethnicity, sexuality, generation, and religion could assume different meanings, depending on the context (Kuperberg, 2018).

This paper aims to discuss violence against women in politics and public life in contexts of democratic backsliding. I am particularly interested in discussing the challenges presented when far-right movements and politicians expand their presence in public debate and electoral disputes. Although we know that far-right politics does not itself exclude women (and can actually be supported by female voters and politicians), its confrontation of human rights could affect female politicians and activists in particular ways. Gendered attacks and hate speech against those who challenge conventional gender norms may deserve special attention.

My hypothesis is that violence against women in politics and public life varies in its patterns depending on the state of democracy and the centrality of far-right parties and politicians in electoral and post-electoral contexts. If this comes to be considered a significant issue for research and policy, it would be important to address the following questions: Do countries experiencing processes of democratic backsliding pose specific challenges to the diagnosis, typification, and strategies to eliminate violence against women in politics and public life? Does the rise of far-right politicians and movements affect women's right to participate and express their opinions?

I address these questions focusing on a specific national context. Brazil combines historical obstacles to women's political participation with a recent escalation in the conflicts concerning gender equality. A clear backlash against gender, expressed mainly by the dismantling of public policy, the withdrawal from international commitments and the definition of feminism as the "enemy" by government actors, intensified since 2016. It became stronger and also more evident with the election of a far-right president in October 2018. The period I am referring to is also one of democratic backsliding.

The two cases discussed in this paper happened in 2018. In March 14th, the human rights defender and elected councilor for Rio de Janeiro Marielle Franco was assassinated. Although two suspects have been arrested, the crime has not been solved until now. Six months after her murder and a couple of weeks before the first round of the national elections that would take place in October 7th, Brazilian women organized an online movement followed by street protests against the far-right presidential candidate Jair Bolsonaro. It was a multiparty movement, gathering women from different parts of the country under the insignia #EleNão (#NotHim). As its electoral potential became clear, coordinated online attacks, disinformation, harassment and threats were registered.

The discussion is organized in three sections, followed by a brief conclusion. First, I present some basic information on Brazil, concerning the state of democracy, the rise of the far right and gender. After that, the second section describes the cases mentioned above, identifying who was targeted, what kinds of violence they suffered, and the consequences for those involved. The third section relies on these cases to discuss whether the current conceptualization and typology of violence against women in politics and public life offers sufficient resources to approach this violence in contexts of democratic backsliding and/or facing the rise of the far right. A brief conclusion discusses the relevance to acknowledge the individual as well as the collective dimensions of violence against woman in politics and public life.

I.   Brazil and the rise of the far right

According to V-Dem, since 2014 Brazilian democracy has retreated significantly in all the definitions considered (deliberative, egalitarian, electoral, liberal, participatory)[2]. That year, the Worker's Party (PT) won its fourth subsequent presidential elections and Dilma Rousseff saw its reelection contested by the party that came in second (The Brazilian Social Democracy Party, PSDB). That was the beginning of a process that would lead to her impeachment in 2016[3].

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[2] See Annex I for the V-Dem Index for Brazilian Democracy. For analysis of this political process, see Avritzer (2018), Cardoso (2020) and Solano (2019). For analysis of the connections between the backlash agains gender and the democratic backsliding, see Biroli (2020) and Biroli, Machado and Vaggione (2020).

[3] Although this is not in the scope of this paper, I should point that Rousseff's approval dropped much before that, in 2013. She won the 2014 election as Brazil became more polarized. Street protests that took thousands to the major Brazilian cities in June 2013 are seen by many as one of the departing points for the political environment that would enable the impeachment of Rousseff, as well as the rise of

The political forces that emerged or expanded in the opposition to the Worker's Party and Rousseff were heterogeneous. Conservative Christian religious groups, right-wing movements denouncing "cultural Marxism", landowners (self-defined as the "agrobusiness" sector) and the military became more influent. Together with those advocating an ultraliberal agenda of privatization and the dismantling of labor and social rights, they would be the political basis supporting the far-right government of Jair Bolsonaro, who won the 2018 elections in the vacuum opened by anti-corruption efforts that destabilized the main political parties.

"Gender ideology" was an important rhetorical strategy in this context, as it justified the converging attempts by religious and non-religious conservative groups to prohibit the discussion about gender, sex education, and critical political debate in schools; the censorship of art exhibitions and theater shows; the persecution of activists for the right to abortion; and the attempt to silence academic feminism.

In this context, attacks consisting of hate speech on social networks became more frequent. They were mostly related to race, gender, and sexuality. They were "coordinated, organized" and had "concrete goals" as they targeted women, especially activists (CodingRights and Internetlab, 2017, p. 11).

The 2018 electoral period was marked by episodes of online and offline violence as well as by disputes over the meanings of violence in politics and its legal consequences (Neris, 2019). For feminists and those concerned with democracy and human rights, the year could be described as starting with the killing of Marielle Franco in March 14th and reaching its clearest outline with the second round of national elections, in October 28th. Perhaps the assassination of Franco could be seen as an extreme unveiling of the failures and limits of Brazilian democracy – thirty years of a pluralistic and stable democracy were not able to guarantee equal opportunities and participation or even

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the far right and its electoral success in 2018. Starting from protests against the rise of public transport fares in São Paulo, they would soon attract groups with different ideological profiles and become mainly anticorruption protests (Tatagiba e Galvão, 2019). In 2014, the "Operation Car Wash", a set of investigations on money laundry and diversion of public funds brought together by public prosecutors and the Federal Police received wide media coverage and affected the main Brazilian political parties, in particular PT, which had won subsequent national elections since 2002.

protect them from high levels of selective structural violence. The election of Jair Bolsonaro, on the other hand, showed the new strength and significance of the far-right agenda and anti-democratic trends which were on the margins of institutional politics for three decades.

A deputy for three decades, that is, the period of democratic consolidation, never stood out for his parliamentary work. On the other hand, he was often under the spotlight as a "polemical" politician because of his defense of the military dictatorship (1964-1985), torture practices, and policemen charged for violence, as well as his loud opposition to human rights. In the decade of 2010, he expressively targeted gender rights, feminism and LGBTQ movements, as he opposed policy for gender equality and sexual diversity (mainly sex education) and became closer to religious conservative groups in Congress[4]. Once elected, his government took on this framework to evoke the combat against "cultural Marxism" and "gender ideology", while denouncing the alleged harms of left-wing politics, feminism and the influence of "foreign interests" acting through the United Nations Organization.

In October 24th, 2018, 52 civil society organizations, including some of the main Brazilian feminist organizations, sent a report to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights of the OAS in which they manifested their concern with the escalation of violence related to the context of the presidential elections, as well as with the attacks made by Bolsonaro and his supporters against social movements and activists. They highlighted the dissemination of fake news, hate speech, and concrete attacks targeting women, LGBTTI, Black, indigenous, quilombolas and people from Northeast Brazil[5]. Today Brazil faces a complex political balance, in which attacks from the government and his supporters against democratic institutions and the dismantling of public policy coexist with counteractions coming from the same institutions (Congress and the Supreme Court) and resistance from civil society. The

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[4] In 2010, he opposed a Bill assuring the right of children to be raised free of "corporal punishment and cruel and degrading treatment" (Bill 7672/2010). To justify his opposition, he said that "if your son becomes a little queer, you beat him up and he changes his behavior". In 2014, he declared that he wouldn`t rape a woman deputy, Maria do Rosário (PT-RS), only because "she didn't deserve it". He was sued by her and later condemned for moral damage. In 2016, he honored the military who tortured president Dilma Rousseff in his vote for her impeachment.
[5] https://www.fidh.org/en/region/americas/brazil/violence-in-the-brazilian-electoral-context-is-denounced-to-the-un

president maintains the approval of 30% to 40% of the population, with higher levels of support among white, male, and evangelical voters[6].

II. Attempts to silence women and coordinated disinformation

This section presents a brief description of two cases of violence against women in politics and public life which occurred in Brazil in 2018. Electoral politics and activism are connected in both cases. Although they are different in their scope (violence against a woman who was an elected representative in a legislative arena, violence against women participating in collective coordinated action in an electoral context), the intention to silence and restrict women's political participation and expression is clear in all the events involved. Attacks and disinformation are also entangled in both cases.

In March 14th 2018, the councilwoman of the city of Rio de Janeiro for the party Socialism and Liberty (PSOL), Marielle Franco, and her driver Anderson Gomes were killed by two men who shot them multiple times from a car, in central Rio. They were returning from as event promoted by an anti-racist organization, entitled "Black women moving structures". There, 38 years-old Franco met other black activists to speak about the challenges and the potential of making politics *as black women*. She spoke about her origin in a poor community and the importance of her access to university education, when she expanded her communitarian activism towards party politics. The relevance of movements to elect and maintain black women in politics was highlighted along with the collective meaning of her elected term. The group of young black activists who met that day addressed the porous borders between institutional politics, activism, cultural identity and the criticism of structural racism[7].

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[6] Until this moment, the dismantling of public policy (in particular those concerning women and environmental protection) and the mismanagement and absence of leadership in the combat against the pandemics of Covid-19 has not affected either the government or the president's approval. On the contrary, the emergency aid approved by the Brazilian Congress for low income citizens, received now by at least one person in 40% of the country households, seems to be the cause for a recent tendency of improve in his approval, which seem to be expanding through regions of the country where they were the lowest.

[7] The event was filmed and can be entirely watched at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c66reiUsSbo (last access September 20th, 2020).

Franco was elected in October 2016, in which 13,5% of the elected for the local legislative chambers in the 5570 Brazilian municipalities were women, less than 5% were black women. In her 14 months and 14 days term, the councilwomen presented Bills to guarantee women's access to legal abortion and to create public spaces for the care of children whose mothers work night shifts[8]. In her propositions and speeches, she acted to combat violence against women, homophobia, and police violence in poor areas of the city (mostly in the "favelas"/slums), to make effective legal guarantees for black and lesbian women, to improve the housing conditions of low-income families and expand the critical debate about the penal system and the imprisonment of black youth. Her term, she said, corresponded to a tripod formed by the debates on the conditions of life in the "favelas", blackness and gender. Her political action was, as she repeated many times, inseparable from her "black body" and her "slum body", systematically excluded from the spaces of political representation[9]. Having this perspective, she manifested against the federal occupation of the state of Rio de Janeiro, effected by a presidential decree of February 16th 2018[10], and denounced the violence by the militias and the police against those living in the poor neighborhoods of Rio[11].

The violence of her assassination would be followed by protests in many cities of the country, with thousands of people holding signs demanding justice for Marielle. These, in turn, would be followed by massive disinformation on social networks and right-wing websites, in attempts to efface Franco's political identity and the political meaning of her black women's body. Right after the murder, fake news about her private life connected her to drug dealers and tried to picture her as someone who lived an "immoral" life. Coordinated efforts to reframe the news about the crime and counterbalance the protests for justice were replicated by right-wing movements, far-right politicians

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[8] Bills 16/2017 and 17/2017, Municipal Chamber of Rio de Janeiro.

[9] Speech in November 13th, 2017, in the Municipal Chamber of Rio de Janeiro.

[10] With the decree, the Brazilian Armed Forces assumed the security activities of the state. Thefts and other crimes against property decreased in the following months, but 2018 had the highest number of deaths caused by police officers in the state since the beginning of a historical series, in 2003. Young black men were the majority of those who lost their lives and the number of feminicides increased in comparison to the previous year. See *Segurança Pública em Número 2018*, http://arquivos.proderj.rj.gov.br/isp_imagens/Uploads/SegurancaemNumeros2018.pdf, p. 5.

[11] https://theintercept.com/2018/03/17/essa-e-a-historia-dos-tres-crimes-que-marielle-franco-denunciou-antes-de-morrer/; https://oglobo.globo.com/rio/quatro-dias-antes-de-ser-assassinada-marielle-franco-compartilhou-denuncia-contra-acao-de-pms-22491429

(including a federal deputy who is a retired military policemen known by his alignments to gun lobby and policemen) and a judge who would later be sued by Marielle's party (PSOL)[12]. They found the resistance and criticism by human rights advocates, feminist and black social movements, Marielle's party (PSOL) and family, as well as many Brazilian journalists and newspapers[13].

Marielle became an important symbol of justice and resistance, what made her a target for fake news and violence months after her murder. In October 3rd 2020, as national elections approached, two far-right candidates broke a plaque with Marielle Franco's name, placed in honor of her in a square in Rio. It is important to understand that this was a public act that they expected to favor them, as this reveals the deeply polarized and violent atmosphere of those elections. A few weeks after that, the two men were elected state deputy and federal deputy. Their presidential candidate, Jair Bolsonaro, also succeeded[14]. Two and a half years later, the crime remains unsolved, although two ex-policemen involved with militias have been arrested and denunciations against politicians were news in different moments.

I will now describe the second case. In 2018, the year of Marielle Franco's murder, women were protagonists in the opposition to the far-right presidential candidacy of Bolsonaro. The main popular movement against his candidacy (#EleNão / #NotHim) started from a Facebook page named "Mulheres Unidas Contra Bolsonaro" (Women United Against Bolsonaro). Created by a young black woman from the northeast of Brazil who was not connected to any party or stablished social movement, the group counted more than a million participants in its first days[15], 4 million in the following weeks. At least 40 other pages and 1,6 million messages were detected as consequences of

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[12] https://brasil.elpais.com/brasil/2018/03/17/politica/1521318452_688519.html; https://exame.com/brasil/noticias-falsas-sobre-marielle-franco-se-espalham-na-internet/.

[13] A study by FGV DAPP showed that there were three waves of news on social networks. In the first 36 hours, they were dominated by indignation and commotion, after that coordinated efforts to spread fake news and defamation were registered. A third wave came as a successful reaction to misinformation. See: http://dapp.fgv.br/reacao-boatos-superou-difusao-de-informacoes-contra-marielle-no-twitter-aponta-estudo-da-fgv-dapp/. As one of the reactions mentioned by the research, the website "A verdade sobre Marielle" was created as a reaction to the spread of fake news, https://www.mariellefranco.com.br/averdade.

[14] They were candidates for PSL, the same party for which Bolsonaro was elected, and were wearing t-shirts with his image and signs of his campaign when they broke the plaque with her name. Soon, protesters on the streets of Rio and São Paulo carried hundreds of plaques reproducing the one that had been broken.

[15] https://exame.com/brasil/mulheres-unidas-contra-bolsonaro-tem-1-milhao-de-membros-no-facebook/

the initial campaign and the insignia #NotHim[16]. The online mobilization also led to street protests in the 26 states of Brazil and the Federal District. They were registered in at least 358 cities, including all the state capitals, every Brazilian city above 500.000 inhabitants, many small cities (at least 78 under 50.000 inhabitants), and other 73 cities abroad[17].

As its electoral potential became evident, violent events against the participants were registered. The original Facebook group was hacked at least twice and had its name changed to "Mulheres *com* Bolsonaro" (Women *with* Bolsonaro). Besides the offences received on social media, the administrators of the Facebook group had their personal cell phones and profiles on social networks hacked. They received threats, were blackmailed and had their SIM-cards cloned, affecting their contacts and professional lives. One of them was physically assaulted by two men carrying guns who hit her in front of her house and escaped taking her phone and other personal belongings (OutrasVozes, 2018). Networks of legal and local protection were created to guarantee the integrity of the women participating in the protests.

On September 29th, while thousands of women were still on the streets, coordinated disinformation was spread. Lies and manipulated images of the protests, messages stigmatizing feminist women based on sexuality, sexual behavior and appearance disputed the narrative about the protests. The women who united against Bolsonaro spoke against authoritarianism and advocated democracy as a regime in which human rights, gender equality, racial equality, and diversity could be guaranteed. Instead of being opposed by their ideas, they were framed as "the enemy", described as ugly and hairy and associated to nakedness and disorder (Cesarino, 2019).

A comparative field research showed that the protests *against* Bolsonaro were enacted by a large majority of women. They dressed and walked through the streets carrying signs advocating feminist agendas and human rights, demanding justice for Marielle Franco, and in favor of democracy. On September 30th, protests *in favor* of his candidacy were organized under the mottos #EleSim

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[16] https://observa2018.dapp.fgv.br/posts/movimento-elenao-impulsiona-mais-de-16-milhao-de-mencoes-no-twitter-contra-e-a-favor-de-bolsonaro/

[17] https://midianinja.org/news/elenao-aconteceu-em-mais-de-400-cidades-em-34-paises-balanco-ninja/

(#HimYes). They were fewer and took less people to the streets. Women were part of them, but the majority of the people on the streets were men. They stood close to vehicles carrying speakers and giant inflatable dolls of Bolsonaro and his candidate to the vice-presidency, a general. They (men and women) dressed in yellow and green, the colors of the Brazilian flag, and some wore military adornments. Signs carried in these protests expressed the defense of the military dictatorship and the opposition "gender ideology" and what they defined as partisan education, as they aligned to the conservative movement "School Without Party" (Kalil, 2018).

Until the end of the electoral period, women voted for Bolsonaro in lower percentages than men, but this gap was reduced after the protests of September 29th and 30th. Some saw this as a result of the movement #NotHim and the fake news and anti-feminist messages spread after that. The dispute about the meanings of the movement produced criticism among some sectors of the left who blamed the female and feminist activism for the advancement of the far-right candidacy[18].

This was also a period of unusual aggression against women journalists, leading to public manifestations by the Brazilian Association for Investigative Journalism[19] and the acknowledgement of the OAS report on the Brazilian elections (OEA, 2018). The attacks were mostly online, but there were also physical attacks, the unveiling of personal data and threats of rape[20]. The columnist of a major national newspapers wrote about the offences she received after interviewing Bolsonaro in a traditional TV show – "slut", "hooker", "you deserve to die", and "you are of the kind deserving to earn less than men" were some of them[21]. The journalist who reported illegal mass messaging through companies using automated systems by the campaign of Bolsonaro was also under violent attacks. As legal investigation based on information revealed by her continued after the election, in February

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[18] In previous analysis, I pointed to the fact that the protests happened a few days after the main evangelical leaders decided to support Bolsonaro. Until now, the of him and his government is higher among the evangelic than among other groups.
[19] https://abraji.org.br/noticias/reporter-tem-whatsapp-invadido-apos-publicar-reportagem-sobre-eleitoras-de-presidenciavel (Sept 24th, 2018); https://www.abraji.org.br/noticias/abraji-registra-156-casos-de-agressoes-a-jornalistas-em-contexto-politico-eleitoral-em-2018 (Jan 18th 2019)
[20] https://veja.abril.com.br/politica/em-2018-137-jornalistas-sofreram-agressao-ou-ameaca-ao-cobrir-eleicao/;
https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/poder/2018/09/jornalista-mineira-e-confundida-com-reporter-da-folha-que-fez-reportagem-sobre-bolsonaro.shtml
[21] https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/colunas/daniela-lima/2018/09/diga-me-com-quem-andas.shtml?origin=folha (Daniela Lima, "Diga-me com quem andas", Folha de S. Paulo, Sept 27th, 2018).

2020 she was falsely accused by one of the involved of offering sexual favors in exchange for information[22].

III.   Conceptual implications

The events that I just described were not isolated ones. In the Brazilian elections of 2018, violence against women candidates also followed well known plots. In at least one case, a candidate for a seat in Senate had intimate images spread on social networks. Lesbian and transexual candidates suffered attacks and threats due to their sexual identities. A young but well-known woman politician who was the candidate for vice-presidency in the left-wing coalition leaded by the Worker's Party (PT) was targeted by coordinated disinformation. Altered photos framed her as a drug addict. The fact that she had a baby daughter who was often with her during the campaign was also a reason for different kinds of offense – she was either framed as an opportunist who exposed her daughter for electoral reasons or a bad mother who engaged in politics instead of taking care of her daughter. Some of these attacks came from far-right women candidates. There are multiple records of sexist, misogynist, and offensive posts and threats against her[23].

Besides that, the economic violence was prominent. The 2018 elections were the first after a decision by the Supreme Court (STF), confirmed by the Superior Electoral Court (TSE), determining that political parties must direct at least 30% of their public funds for electoral campaigns to support women's candidacies. This was an important advancement in the Brazilian electoral quota law, Law 9.504/1997. Since 1997, it reserves at least 30% of the positions on electoral party lists for women[24]. Many women candidates have since denounced the misuse of the funds and the threats and

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[22] President Jair Bolsonaro is also being sued for sexually insults uttered against the journalist. She describes the offenses and threats in articles (see https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/poder/2020/03/depoimento-no-brasil-ser-mulher-nos-transforma-em-alvo-de-ataques.shtml) and also in the book "The hate machine: notes of a reporter about fake news and digital violence" (São Paulo: Cia. Das Letras, 2020).
[23] See TretAqui.org and Outras Vozes (2018).
[24] In 2009, the law was changed to determine the "occupation" instead of "reservation" of places. Only then the percentage of women candidate got close to the required 30%, which was surpassed only in the 2018 elections. For more information about the strategic litigation that led to the decision by the Brazilian Supreme Court in favor of a minimum funding for women's candidacies, see Campos (2019).

harassment suffered by them. Some describe that they were coerced to return the money to their parties or sign false receipts[25].

This multiple set of events could perhaps reinforce the idea that those described in the last section just illustrate different practices, degrees and consequences of the violence suffered by women as politicians and activists. I disagree. I understand that they indicate that violence against women in politics could take on specific patterns depending on the state of democracy and the role of the far right in the disputes.

First, the rise of far-right movements and politicians press the boundaries of the political debate and practices, expanding the use of hate speech and disinformation – and making them "usual" politics, with the help of current technological devices and social networks. Hate speech and disinformation are key to produce an "explosion of antagonisms that can challenge the very foundations of civility"[26]. When they target women in a context of backlash against gender, they justify exclusion and violence[27]. In the two cases discussed in this paper, dehumanization was a reiterated strategy.

Second, anti-pluralist ideologies play an important role in the normalization of violence against women in politics and public life. The cases discussed in this paper involve actors explicitly stating their opposition to social and political pluralism. The example of the two men who broke the street plaque with Marielle Franco's name to promote their candidacies clearly show that violence against women in politics can actually become a political asset in such a context. They strategically normalize violence. In Brazil, democracy coexisted with high levels of social violence. However, one of the effects of the rise of the far right is the open vindication of violence as a legitimate alternative to maintain social order[28]. This contributes to efface the borders between the rule of law and "justified" crimes.

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[25] These cases are known in Brazil as "candidaturas laranja" (orange candidacies), referring to the popular use of "oranges" to characterize those lending their names to cover-up criminal practices of others. Most of the denounces came from women who were candidates for the PSL, the same party as Bolsonaro. See https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/poder/2019/11/investigadas-em-esquema-de-laranjas-do-psl-dizem-que-verba-delas-ajudou-bolsonaro.shtml.

[26] I evoke Chantal Mouffe's differentiation between agonism, understood as the dispute between political adversaries, and antagonism, defined as the fight between enemies, to address the making of adversaries into "enemies" by the far right (Mouffe, 2005, p. 21).

[27] For analysis connecting the backlash against gender and violence against women in politics, see Biroli (2018) and Sanín (2020).

[28] Jair Bolsonaro's symbol during his campaign was a gun. This was replicated by his supporters all around the country.

My third observation is that violence against women activists demand special concern. It is part of wider attempts to silence criticism and restrict unconventional agendas. But it is also a mechanism to silence women and prevent their participation in public life. In contexts of democratic backsliding, political opposition and criticism becomes a risky activity. When gender conflicts are at the center of the order that is being disputed, this poses a very difficult situation for women. The attacks could also prevent women activists from engaging in electoral politics – and the risks are pronouncedly higher if they are black, act in poor neighborhoods or land conflict areas, are lesbian or transexual.

Conclusion

After Marielle's assassination, many black women ran for office defending her legacy. The slogan "Marielle became a seed" was part of their campaigns and some were part of collective candidacies which are now an innovative democratic tool for minority groups in particular. #EleNão was a collective experience of political participation. It did not end with the electoral period and was revived in other protests since.

These women showed resistance and resilience. What we seek, however, is a democratic future in which violence is not the cost for women making politics. I understand that in many parts of the world this depends on how we are going to guarantee their participation in politics and public life in a period of democratic crisis.

Reports of threats and harassment against women politicians and activists became more frequent after the election of a far-right president. Direct state violence is not necessarily required as individuals and groups aligned to far-right ideologies and/or willing to impose their dominion through violence understand that their space for non-punishable action increased. In these contexts, women advocating for the right to abortion, young lesbian activists, human rights and environmental activists in land conflict areas, indigenous and black women in increasingly militarized areas need to be clearly addressed if we want to build alternatives to eliminate violence against women in politics.

I finish this paper with three observations. In many countries, Brazil included, we lack consistent data to systematically identify acts of violence and how they affect women in politics. This assumes specific outlines when activists are the ones affected by political violence. Theis vulnerability could be greater if they can't count on political party structures and or institutional positions – although we do know that this is not enough to contain violence against women politicians. The patterns of violence and risk vary depending on race, ethnicity, sexuality, but also the part of the country where they live. In order to find alternatives, we need to have a better knowledge of the phenomenon we are discussing. In contexts where the democratic backsliding is clearly gendered, the support for this kind of research has been withdrawn.

The lack of specific law addressing violence against women in politics and public life is an important issue. This is the case in Brazil. The possibility to pass such a law and to make it effective could be reduced in contexts of democratic backsliding. On the other hand, the debate and the process of building legal alternatives to eliminate this kind of violence could be significant in itself. It could add to the recognition of the phenomenon, reinforcing resistances and opposing its naturalization.

Finally, global collaboration was central to the building of this agenda (Krook, 2019). The backlash against gender equality is also a transnational phenomenon (Biroli, Machado and Vaggione, 2020). Its connections to the rise of the far right in different parts of the world still needs clarification. What we do know is that their connected in countries as different as Brazil, Hungary, Poland, Romania. Global collaboration could add to local resistance against the criminalization of feminist movements, the censorship of gender studies and debate and, peculiarly, the attempts to silence women in politics and public life through violence.

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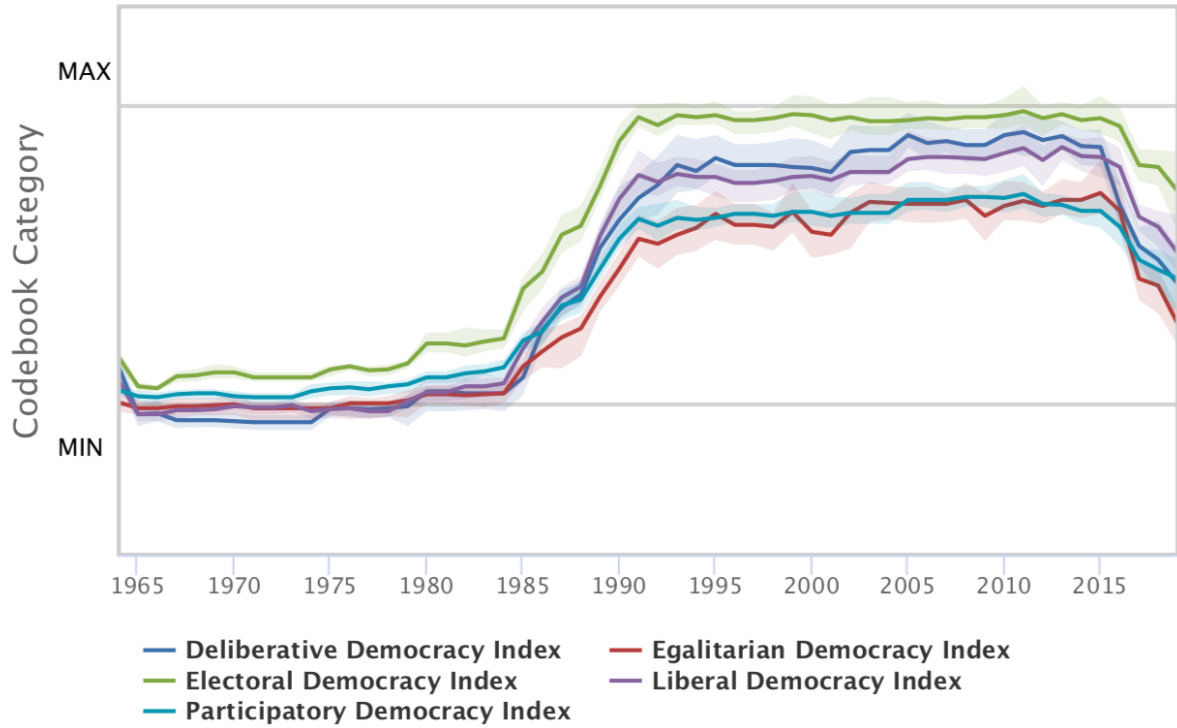
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