GENDER AND POLITICS

Introduction

Conventional models of international relations that seek to explain the origins and impact of political violence typically ignore issues of gender and tend to focus instead on forces such as regime type, economic development, or religion to explain the reasons for conflict. Yet there is no factor more important for understanding the sources and consequences of political violence than gender. In fact, the most comprehensive recent work on the relationship between the status of women in society and the security of states provides overwhelming evidence that the subordination of women in society results in myriad and severely negative consequences. These include higher levels of both intra-state and inter-state violence and terrorism, as well as other notable problems such as reduced food security and longevity, as well as higher rates of malnutrition, disease, poverty, fertility and corruption.

The historical neglect of gender issues in conflict studies, as well as the fundamental role of female subordination in instigating and sustaining political violence, reflects an ideological bias that has privileged the importance of structural political and economic forces largely controlled by men. But an ideology that assumes and accepts male dominance over women also constitutes a significant structural factor in explaining conflict itself.

Political ideology is organized around common values, some of which revolve around privilege and dominance of some groups at the expense of others. Such ideologies provide the unifying themes, goals and plans for action that organize adherents into an effective fighting force. And there is no more universal normative prescription in conflict than the political, social, economic and sexual subordination of women to men. Such systems of domination and subordination persist despite the cost to both women and the majority of men precisely because it is the most powerful men who design and control the political and economic structures that subordinate women, and they are the ones who benefit the most from such control. High status men benefit enormously, both economically as well as reproductively, by using their influence to perpetuate their control over the production and reproductive capacity of women. In short, asymmetries in

power operate to perpetuate systems that harm women, children and the majority of men and increase rates of domestic and political violence.

There are many ways that gender and political violence are intricately intertwined, including the important role that gender inclusion plays in the stability of peacekeeping efforts after conflict. For reasons of space, this discussion will concentrate around two important areas: the role of gender inequality in sparking conflict, and the role of sexual violence during conflict.

Gender and ConflictThere are numerous ways that gender issues contribute to conflict. Earlier importantwork by Mary Caprioli *et al.*established the statistically significant influence of gender inequality on both international and domestic violence. Specifically, this work found that gender equality within a state makes a state less likely to engage in violence toward other states. In particular, states with greater domestic gender equality are less likely to use force first against other nations. Moreover, states with greater levels of gender inequality are more likely to suffer from civil wars and other forms of intrastate conflict . Importantly, these relationships are not simply related to the frequency of international conflict, but to their severity as well. As the level of gender inequality rises, the severity of violence in conflict also increases .

The obvious question based on this important earlier work revolves around the mechanisms by which gender inequity leads to violence. Valerie Hudson *et al.* have begun to identity some of the most significant dynamics by which gender inequality leads to greater internal and external violence. In earlier work, she documented the relationship between son preference and its resulting sex ratio imbalance and greater interstate conflict, particularly focusing on Asia . First, when male dominance pervades a society, it creates and enforces a system of unequal family law that produces greater state instability, and thus less national security. Family law refers to those laws that affect the governance of the family, including such issues as legal age of marriage, as well as divorce, child custody and inheritance rights. Societies that privilege male over female rights in such areas tend to be characterized by inefficiency and coercive forms of conflict resolution. Empirical results show a significant relationship between inequity in family law and state stability and security. Second, and related, when family laws tends to privilege men over women, clan governance often becomes the preferred mode of political order. Clan governance is characterized by an extreme privileging of the male family line. This causes severe perversions in the marriage

market and directly leads to the extreme subordination of women. This happens through a variety of mechanisms but one of the most important is that male relatives control when and who their female relatives marry, often allowing daughters to marry very young, or in order to cement an important male alliance through the birth of male kin. In addition, clan governance systems tend to be patrilocal, whereby women must physically move out of their natal area to join the families of their husbands, often leaving them far from male kin who might otherwise protect them from abuse. Last, and related, perversions in the marriage market go far beyond the effect of patrilocality on male control of female relatives. There are two other inter-related phenomena. When men control the marriage market, polygyny rates tend to increase. Recent work has shown a direct influence of degree of polygyny on over a dozen negative outcomes to men, women, children and the nation-state, including levels of civil rights and political freedoms. Rich men control the system, and use it for their own benefit to obtain more wives. This leaves many disproportionately young and poor men without access to wives or children, incentivizing them to engage in violence to raise their status or wealth in order to afford a wife.

In addition, Hudson *et al.* have shown that rising brideprice, or the resources that must be given to a woman's family by the groom's family upon marriage, contributes to violent conflict, including terrorism. In systems where male lines are privileged, men cannot join adult society until they have son. In over seventy-five percent of the world, this means generating enough money, sometimes from one's father, to purchase a wife. This not only allows senior men to dominate junior ones through their control of such vital resources, but also incentivizes illegal activities and other forms of organized violence in order to obtain brides, or the money to buy them. In this way, high and increasing brideprice contributes to as well as causes higher rates of gender inequality since women have little to no say over who, when or how they marry, and often have no control over when or how many children they must bear.

Terrorism

The critical role of brideprice in distorting marriage markets in agnatic societies illuminates the efforts of Boko Haram and other terrorist groups to provide wives to those men who have few resources through kidnapping. But this is not the only way in which gender issues contribute to terrorism. A great deal of recent work

has used qualitative methods to examine the extent to which assumptions about gender roles in particular incentivize other terrorist activities as well. Many of these arguments stress the importance of honor and shame in cultures that encourage hypermasculine forms of behavior that encourage and glorify violence .

Survey work not only demonstrates a greater likelihood for male political violence in areas that endorse gender inequality, but also shows that such attitudes toward dominance spreads to other out-groups. Specifically, both men and women who support gender inequality are more likely to show greater hostility toward minorities within their own country, as well as toward other countries .

In addition, there has been some quantitative work exploring the relationship between gender equality and political violence, including terrorism, conducted by Victor Asal *et al.* Examining over a hundred Middle Eastern political organizations over a quarter century, they find that when women are not given formal legal and political rights, which they call gender exclusivity, higher rates of political violence result. This work shows that gender inclusivity is a better predictor of political violence than even whether a group is religious or not . In examining incidents of domestic terrorism in over 150 countries over the last 35 years, other scholars find a significant negative relationship with women's political rights. Restricting themselves to American victims of terrorist attacks in 156 countries over the last 25 years, other work also found a significant similar negative relationship between womens' social, economic and political rights and the number of incidents. In other words, both periods of time, as well as geographic locations, where women have fewer rights are more likely to experience terrorist activity.

Gender can influence not only who perpetuates attacks, but who is victimized as well. Huber introduces a provocative model of terrorist targeting by arguing that gender equality increases the cost to targeting civilians by increasing the public's negative reaction relative to attacks against the government. Examining terrorists incidents in India between 1970–2007, Huber finds that as gender equality increases, attacks against civilians relative to government targets declines, showing that gender can play a significant role in terrorist targeting strategies.

Sexual violence in conflict

After violence starts, females experience a disproportionate share of the consequences. As the Peace Research Institute of Oslo recently reported, 'Men are more likely to die during conflicts, whereas women die more often of indirect causes after the conflict is over.' And, in fact, more women died as a result of violence in the 20th century than all the deaths caused by combat combined, including both world wars. In addition, women are far more likely to experience the kind of sexual victimization that inevitably comes in the wake of conflict.

Sexual violence during conflict can be endemic, if not always ubiquitous, but it can be very hard to get an accurate handle on its incidence because of the difficulties, shame and stigma involved in reporting and collecting such data. A list experiment in the Sri Lankan conflict revealed that thirteen percent of respondents had personally experienced sexual violence. Clearly better means of reporting need to developed.

Recent work has examined the nature of these events as well as their consequences. The recent increase in this work has been potentiated by the dataset, Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict, compiled by Cohen and Nordas .

Elisabeth Wood has provided an extremely helpful and productive typology for rape in war, characterizing it not only as the strategy it is often referred to, but rather a practice that rests on the gendered norms and beliefs of combatants. Rape and sexual violence can occur for many reasons, including opportunity, and take various forms, including forced prostitution. Indeed, work by Cohen shows that militias that recruit children are associated with higher levels of sexual violence, especially when they are trained by the state, providing support for the notion of rape as a socialized practice as well as a strategy.

The practice of sexual violence during conflict can also serve other functions as well. These purposes can help explain variance in the use and incidence of sexual violence in conflict. For example, Cohen argues that sexual violence is used as a means of creating social cohesion among groups that use coercion for recruitment during civil wars. Hoover Green characterizes the practice in terms of the 'Commander's Dilemma,' noting that leaders must create a strong and effective fighting force while still maintaining control over their fighters. She argues that the degree of political education can help explain variance in rates of constraint against sexual violence. Specifically, groups with greater political education show less violence than those with weaker or more intermittent forms of political

education. One example of this can be seen in the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in Uganda. As with Boko Haram, LRA engaged in abductions of girls into forced marriages. Yet rape outside these forced marriages was rare. Both the forced marriages and the prohibition against rape were essential to the success of an armed group that had to operate in an environment with few resources and little popular support. Other work provides support for the notion that external forces can influence the incidence of rape in conflict. For example, the degree to which rebels require local support in order to exploit resources affects the degree to which they can effectively engage in sexual violence. Smugglers require the cooperation of the local population and this constrains the incidence of sexual violence.

Incidents of rape and sexual violence can also serve larger political purposes on the part of the state as well, particularly with regard to legal liability. In Sri Lanka, for example, the government engaged in selective prosecution of high profile sexual violence to gain greater political legitimacy among important domestic constituents. In so doing, the government could exploit sexual violence to achieve greater political support and legitimacy.

The exploitation of the image of female victims necessarily raises questions about female perpetrators of sexual violence, as well as male victims. Cohen argues that in Sierra Leone, women faced similar pressures to men to engage in sexual violence during conflict. Providing related support, in an examination of female fighters from 1980 to 2009, Loken suggests that female fighters do not constrain the incidence of rape during wartime. On the flip side, males also experience sexual violence in conflict, but their plight tends to be less recognized and the negative effects less acknowledged.

A spate of recent work has explored various aspects of sexual violence in armed conflict. External peacekeeping efforts do seem to be able to reduce the level of sexual violence during conflict, although they work more quickly when led by governments than by rebels. They are most effective at constraint when they incorporate large and multinational groups. Certainly reports of high levels of sexual violence are more likely to generate action on the part of the United Nations, making more effective large and multinational missions more likely to occur. This highlights the role of public naming and shaming in reducing the incidence of sexual violence in conflict. Interestingly, states that experience high levels of sexual violence during war are more likely to adopt governmental

gender quotes sooner, actually increasing the degree of post-conflict female political representation.

Indeed, one of the few bright spots in this literature indicates that feminist social movements, as opposed to governmental or economic policies, predicts variation in state policies designed to combat violence against women. This work shows that these movements can produce lasting impact by institutionalizing these protections into international norms.

Conclusion

Gender interacts with political violence through every stage of conflict. Gender hierarchies that privilege male over female rights and liberties contributes greatly to the incidence and pattern of violence. The effects are perpetuated by inequitable family law and perversions in the marriage market induced by high brideprice and high rates of polygyny in particular. These effects, which are particularly strong under clan based governance systems, make countries that experience higher rates of gender inequity much more likely to experience higher rates of political violence both internationally and domestically. These effects also make terrorist activities more likely as well. Second, sexual violence also remains an endemic aspect of armed conflict, causing huge amounts of suffering among victims.

The reason that gender intersects so extensively with political violence results from the often implicit but typically imposed social dominance hierarchies that privileges males over females in myriad ways. Such hierarchies privilege powerful males who can perpetuate structures that benefit them to the detriment of the majority of society. These hierarchies are replicated across generations as children watch their parents interact and model various means of conflict resolution. When these strategies involve violence, it becomes simple, easy and obvious for people to replicate such patterns of conflict resolution within the wider world. And yet, ironically, social structures that privilege, endorse and enforce male value over female value end up producing outcomes that are worse for everyone, including men.