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What Makes a Radical?: An exploration of sexism, social dominance orientation, and political violence.

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Abstract

How do sexist attitudes predict one's likelihood of endorsing political violence? While past research identifies a link between hostile sexism and political violence, benevolent sexism has been overlooked. This article explores social dominance orientation (SDO) as a motivator to explain why individuals who hold attitudes of hostile or benevolent sexism are more likely to endorse political violence. Using survey data collected by the American National Election Studies, this article established a positive relationship between both hostile and benevolent sexism and an individual's willingness to endorse state violence. Results also show a weak mediated relationship between SDO, hostile sexism, and endorsement of state violence. These findings suggest that sexist attitudes do play a role in political violence, but many factors in addition to SDO seem to impact this relationship. Further examination into the factors connecting sexism and political violence should be explored in future research.

On January 6th, 2021, over 2,000 Americans stormed the U.S. Capitol building in an attempt to prevent Congress from formalizing Joe Biden's 2020 Presidential win over incumbent Donald Trump. The mob's explicit goal was to "stop the steal," as they saw it, and maintain Trump's hold onto power. Encouraged by the President, the overwhelmingly white, male group infiltrated the building, pilfering and vandalizing anything they could get their hands on to express their dissatisfaction with Trump's loss. Watching from home in disbelief, millions of Americans were forced to ask themselves: "How could something like this happen here?"

Examining the backgrounds of January 6th's participants reveals an interesting throughline: violence against women. A Huffington Post investigation found that at least 12 men who participated in the insurrection had a history of violence against women, with several of them having been convicted for crimes such as abuse, simple assault, or sexual assault.[1] The theme of gendered violence also showed its head during the riot itself, when a group of majority male participants stormed then Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi's office. One man was photographed with his feet up on her desk, and left her a note: "Bigo was here, biatch."[2] Years after the Capitol attack, supporters of Trump have coined a new slogan to express their dissatisfaction with the "stolen" election, "Joe and the hoe gotta go." The hoe, of course, refers to America's first female vice president, Kamala Harris.

It is perplexing at first glance to see such a high degree of sexism infused in a movement that is seemingly unrelated to gender politics. Sadly, the January 6th riots are far from the only time misogyny has foreshadowed a tragic act of mass political violence. Violence against women regularly appears in the pasts of American terrorists. From the 2015 Planned Parenthood

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[1] Alanna Vagianos, "Revealed: Even More Insurrectionists Have Histories of Violence Against Women," Huffington Post, June 11, 2021.

[2] https://www.npr.org/2023/05/25/1178099337/richard-barnett-who-put-his-feet-on-nancy-pelosis-desk-is-sentenced-to-over-4-ye

shooting to the 2012 massacre at Sandy Hook Elementary School, terrorists, both domestic and foreign, have shared a common trait: misogyny.[3] These men all displayed an array of contempt, disrespect, and violence against women in the years leading up to their depraved acts, regardless of their expressed motivations for committing mass violence. Despite this clear connection, violence against women continues to be treated as domestic, not political.

Political violence in the United States has become a salient issue of concern among politicians, the media, and ordinary citizens alike. White supremacist and religious ideologies motivate the majority of explorations into domestic political violence as instances of violence against these groups have increased over the past decade.[4] While it is certainly necessary to explore the rise in these ideologies, the accompanying rise in misogynistic violence and male supremacist extremism has remained overlooked by the dominant narratives surrounding political violence.

The Southern Poverty Law Center defines male supremacy as a "hateful ideology advocating for the subjugation of women and rigid gender roles."[5] Like other ideologies, male supremacy encompasses a number of ideologies that express hostile sexism, a type of sexism which perceives noncompliance with traditional gender roles as a threat to men's dominant societal position.[6]

The role that sexist ideology plays in political violence has been less acknowledged than other ideologies, despite the overwhelming majority of domestic terrorist acts being perpetrated

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[3] Rebecca Traister, "What Mass Killers Really Have in Common," *The Cut*, July 15, 2016, https://www.thecut.com/2016/07/mass-killers-terrorism-domestic-violence.html.

[4] "Facts and Statistics," The United States Department of Justice, April 4, 2023, https://www.justice.gov/hatecrimes/hate-crime-statistics.

[5] "Male Supremacy," Southern Poverty Law Center, 2022, https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/ideology/male-supremacy.

[6] Laora Mastari, Bram Spruyt, and Jessy Siongers, "Benevolent and Hostile Sexism in Social Spheres: The Impact of Parents, School and Romance on Belgian Adolescents' Sexist Attitudes," *Frontiers in Sociology* 4 (2019), https://doi.org/10.3389/fsoc.2019.00047.

by men.[7] Furthermore, some findings show that high numbers of domestic terrorists express a hatred of women, regardless of whether said hatred was their main motivation for committing violence.[8] These facts suggest that gender plays a highly influential role in the likelihood of a person embracing or committing political violence, yet the causal links between these constructs remain unexplored.

The main aim of this article is to explore the relationship between sexist attitudes and the endorsement of political violence. Using Ambivalent Sexism Theory and Social Dominance Theory, I motivate an investigation into the relationship between both hostile and benevolent sexism and the endorsement of political violence. I will also explore social dominance orientation as a potential cause or influential factor of this relationship.

Literature Review

A breadth of research across several disciplines have studied the factors that influence political violence, including the role of gender and sexist attitudes. This review of the literature will provide an overview of the prevailing themes in the research surrounding these topics and will identify gaps in the research to be addressed by this study. I will begin by discussing the ideological and other attitudinal factors which influence political violence. In the following section, I will synthesize feminist scholars' analyses of gender's role in political violence. Lastly, I will provide an overview of Ambivalent Sexism Theory and previous uses of it in examining political violence.

Political Violence: Attitudinal Influences

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[7] "Terrorists in the United States since 9/11, by Year and Gender 2022," Statista, November 1, 2022, https://www.statista.com/statistics/667929/terrorists-in-the-us-since-911-year-and-gender/.

[8] Melissa Johnston and Sara Meger, "The Linkages Between Violent Misogyny and Violent Extremism and Radicalization That Lead to Terrorism," OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, 2022), https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/d/c/525297.pdf; Caron E. Gentry, "Misogynistic Terrorism: It Has Always Been Here," *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 15, no. 1 (February 2022): pp. 209-224, https://doi.org/10.1080/17539153.2022.2031131.

Before a person commits an act of political violence, they must first adopt political opinions which justify or necessitate violence in the eyes of the perpetrator. The process of adopting these beliefs is called radicalization. Scholars define radicalization in two ways: The first and most widely used definition refers simply to the processes that occur before an individual commits a terrorist act.[9] This definition is most focused on the outcome of political violence, and uses broad language in order to include the breadth of radicalization processes that could potentially occur in each case. Another definition establishes radicalization as the adoption of beliefs that are outside of the acceptable spectrum.[10] Unlike the previous definition, this interpretation does not necessitate that a violent act occurs in order to consider an individual "radicalized"; instead, there is a broader focus on the ideology rather than the actions of the radicalized individual. While notably different definitions, they do not contradict each other, and are both considered valid interpretations of the term.

Psychologists have theorized much of the radicalization process as occurring at the individual level. For the most part, scholars agree that radicalization of the individual begins with a perceived societal injustice,[11] accompanied by a lack of confidence in state-sanctioned methods for confronting grievances against the state, such as voting or legal protest.[12] Additionally, scholars identify ideology and group dynamics as contributing factors to the radicalization process. People who adopt ideologies which justify extreme acts are more likely to endorse the

[9] Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko, "Understanding Political Radicalization: The two-pyramids model," *The American Psychologist* 72, no. 3 (2017): 205-16.

[10] Jeremy Gines, "The Moral Logic of Political Violence," *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 23, no.1 (2019): 1-3.

[11] McCauley and Moskalenko, "Understanding Political Radicalization."

[12] Karin Dyrstad and Solveig Hillesund, "Explaining Support for Political Violence: Grievance and perceived opportunity," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 64, no. 9 (2020): 1724-1753

use of said acts, and social pressure may make a skeptical group member more inclined to agree with the beliefs and actions of the group.[13]

While such research does well to identify why certain ideologies may radicalize a person to the point of violence, it still does not explain why some "radicals" commit violence while many others do not. The research explaining the leap from being politically radicalized to the perpetration of political violence identifies numerous factors as playing some role in the process. Some scholars suggest that politically radicalized people engage in violence if they believe that legal protest methods are insufficient for addressing their complaints.[14] Others argue that political discontent rises to the level of justifying violence when followers have come to identify personally with the abstract ideas and cases that they support, or if they have become socially isolated from those who do not share their beliefs.[15] Still, other scholars are unconvinced by either argument, asserting that strong ideological commitment and social isolation are not sufficient in explaining why some people commit political violence over others.[16]

Those unpersuaded by ideological explanations of political violence point to personality factors such as *trait aggression* as the most likely explanation for political violence. Trait aggression is defined as a "dispositional tendency toward such aggressive behavior across situations and over time."[17] Multiple researchers have found a strong connection between those who score high in trait aggression and support for political violence.[18] Such research suggests

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[13] Gary LaFree and Joshua D. Freilich, *The Handbook of the Criminology of Terrorism* (Hoboken: Wiley Blackwell, 2017).

[14] McCauley and Moskalenko, "Understanding Political Radicalization."; Dyrstad and Hillesund, "Explaining Support for Political Violence."

[15] Gines, "The Moral Logic of Political Violence."

[16] J. Githens-Mazer and R. Lambert, "Why Conventional Wisdom on Radicalization Fails: The persistence of a failed Discourse," *International Affairs 86,* no. 4 (2010): 889-901.

[17] David S. Chester and Samuel J. West, "Trait Aggression is Primarily a Facet of Antagonism: Evidence from Dominance, Latent Correlational, and Item-Level Analyses," *Journal of Research in Personality* 89 (2020): 104042, https://doi.org/10/1016/j.jrp.2020.1104042.

[18] Nathan P. Kalmoe, "From Fistfights to Firefights: Trait Aggression and Support for State Violence," *Political Behavior* 35 (2013): 311-330; Sara Jahnke, Katharina Abad Borger, and Andreas Beelmann, "Predictors of Political Violence Outcomes Among Young People: A systematic review and meta-analysis," *Political Psychology*

that rather than being motivated by ideology, those who perpetrate political violence do so because of a general disposition towards violent behavior. In short, people who are more likely to commit any type of violence are more likely to commit political violence as well.

Though certainly the most obvious and straight-forward answer, the trait aggression explanation leaves some questions. Even if a person commits violence for the simple fact that they are an aggressive person, this still does not explain why the violence would be political in nature. So despite the strong connection, trait aggression is only one part of the story.

Gender and Political Violence

It is well understood that a vast majority of all political violence –and violence in general– are committed by men rather than women. Mason and Kalmoe, for example, find a positive relationship between gender, sexism, and political violence.[19] Despite this, much of the research exploring the relationship between gender and political violence focuses on women: why do they under-participate in political violence? What factors must be present to motivate a woman to commit violence, since she is less likely to do so than a man? Many studies ponder women's uncommon instances of participating in political violence rather than questioning why men's participation is more commonplace.[20] And while these studies do ask important questions about the role of gender in political violence, the framing of such questions regards the male behavior of increased participation as standard, implying that women's participation is more exceptional. Furthermore, even though some scholars have found compelling evidence of the

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43, no. 1 (2022): 111-129; Nathan P. Kalmoe and Liliana Mason, *Radical American Partisanship: Mapping Violent Hostility, Its Causes and the Consequences for Democracy* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2022).

[19] Nathan P. Kalmoe and Lilliana Mason, *Radical American Partisanship: Mapping Violent Hostility, Its Causes, and the Consequences for Democracy* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2022).

[20] Carrie Hamilton, "The Gender Politics of Political Violence: Women armed activists in ETA," *Feminist Review* 86, no. 1 (2007): 132-148; Linda Åhäll, "Motherhood, Myth and Gendered Agency in Political Violence," *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 14, no. 1 (2012): 103-120; Miranda Alison, "Women as Agents of Political Violence: Gendering security," *Security Dialogue* 35, no. 4 (2004): 447-463; S.V. Raghaven and Viswanathan Balasubramaniyan, "Evolving Role of Women in Terror Groups: Progression or regression?" *Journal of International Women's Studies* 15, no. 2 (2014): 197-211.

influence of gender on political violence, others dismiss the role of gender in political violence altogether.[21] This dismissal is largely due to the characterization of violence against women as domestic rather than political in nature.[22]

To be sure, feminist scholars have noticed and responded to this gap in political science research, taking great care to examine the gendered difference in how political violence is perpetrated and experienced. Scholars have noted that women experience political violence in radically different ways than men. Gabrielle Bardall, Elin Bjarnegård, and Jennifer M. Piscopo identify *gendered forms* of political violence as unique manifestations of violence that only impact women, regardless of the motivation behind said violence.[23] Bardall et al. exemplify Myanmar, where both men and women candidates of the opposition were targeted for political attacks, but the methods used against each were gendered (women were portrayed as having "loose morals"; men in similar positions were not subjected to the same criticisms).[24]

Gender does not just impact how political violence is carried out; evidence suggests that gender roles and stereotypes play a significant role in who commits political violence. Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, exploring violence during war, identifies violence as a system of gender; women become the "mother" of their nation as they operate the homefront, while men go off to war to "protect" them.[25] Similarly, Carrie Hamilton likens militarism and masculinity in explaining why women participate less in political violence.[26] While, as mentioned, this research focuses on

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[21] Carl Philipp Schröder et al., "Radicalization in Adolescence: The identification of vulnerable groups," *European Journal on Criminal Policy and Research* 28, no. 2 (2010): 177-201.

[22] Caron E. Gentry, "Misogynistic Terrorism: It Has Always Been Here," *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 15, no. 1 (February 2022): pp. 209-224,

[23] Gabrielle Bardall, Elin Bjarnegård, and Jennifer M. Piscopo, "How is Political Violence Gendered? Disentangling motives, forms, and impacts," *Political Studies* 68, no. 4 (2020): 916-935.

[24] Bardall et al, "How is Political Violence Gendered?", 920-1.

[25] Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, "Political Violence and Gender During Times of Transition," *Colum. J. Gender & L. 15* (2006): 829.

[26] Hamilton, "The Gender Politics of Political Violence," 132-148.

women's motivations, it implies that men's motivations for committing acts of political violence may be derived from the same logic that causes women to abstain: adherence to gender roles.

Evidence for the role of gender stereotyping in political violence also shows itself in the cultures that said violence is derived from. Aoláin finds a well-established connection between the subordination of women in a state and that state's likelihood for violence.[27] In Ann-Dorte Christensen and Sune Qvotrup Jensen's analysis of men and political radicalization in American politics, they identify the "hyper-masculine imagery" used by former President George W. Bush to justify the War on Terror. Christensen and Jenson utilize the framework of *hegemonic masculinity,* the image of the "ideal" man which motivates how "real" men should behave. Social pressure to achieve the masculine ideal may push some men into extreme actions to "prove" their masculinity.[28]

Gender also appears in the rhetoric used by political extremists; modern extremist movements use appeals to masculinity in their messaging. As found by Rachel Kleinfield, the majority of recent political violence in the United States has been supported by white, Christian evangelical Republicans who believe that white Christian men are under attack and must be defended.[29] While gender only accounts for part of the story of political violence in the United States, appeals to a return to traditional gender roles are nevertheless an essential piece of alt-right ideology.

Ambivalent Sexism Theory

Ambivalent Sexism Theory is a framework for understanding the contradictory nature of gender-based prejudice developed by psychologists Peter Glick and Susan T. Fiske. The theory

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[27] Aoláin, "Political Violence and Gender During Times of Transition."

[28] Ann-Dorte Christensen and Sune Qvotrup Jensen, "Men, Resistance and Political Radicalization,' *NORMA* 5, no.2 (2011): 77-84.

[29] Rachel Kleinfield, "The Rise of Political Violence in the United States," *Journal of Democracy* 32, no. 4 (2021): 160-176.

posits a two-prong understanding of sexism: Hostile sexism, which is the more commonly used term, refers to negative feelings of contempt or anger towards women, particularly those who deviate from accepted gender norms. Benevolent sexism, on the other hand, refers to subjectively positive feelings towards women who adhere to gender roles, and suggests a reverence towards women who exhibit "feminine" qualities such as empathy or purity.[30] Glick and Fiske propose that both versions of sexism manifest in a majority of cultures to "legitimize conventional gender relations and roles" by reinforcing adherence and punishing dissent from accepted gender roles.[31]

Of the two modes of sexism proposed by the Ambivalent Sexism Theory, hostile sexism is most commonly mentioned and studied in political violence research. There is a fairly intuitive connection between attitudes of hostile sexism and the endorsement of political violence, as found most notably by political scientists Nathan Kalmoe and Lilliana Mason in their book, *Radical American Partisanship: Mapping Violent Hostility, Its Causes and the Consequences for Democracy.* It is suggested that this connection may have to do with trait aggression; individuals who are generally aggressive are more likely to both hold sexist attitudes and commit political violence.While there may be truth in this, Kalmoe and Mason did not find that other attitudes, such as racism, predicted political violence as well as hostile sexism, which implies some unique relationship may exist.[32]

Where hostile sexism has been consistently included in research, fewer attempts have been made to study the role that benevolent sexism plays in predicting political violence, representing a massive gap in the research on gender and political violence. Because benevolent sexism captures the more "positive" attitudes of misogyny, and even implies a respect towards

[30] Peter Glick and Susan T. Fiske, "Ambivalent Sexism," *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* vol. 33: 115-188.

[31] Glick and Fiske, "Ambivalent Sexism," 115.

[32] Kalmoe and Mason, *Radical American Partisanship.*

women who fulfill their gendered duties and exhibit traditionally feminine characteristics, many have overlooked the possibility that benevolent sexism can play its own role in motivating or predicting political violence.

Gaps in the Research

Although common themes emerge among the plethora of research examining political violence, there exists a lack of consensus on what motivates said violence. Researchers have meticulously detailed the role that ideology, personality, and societal factors play in the phenomenon, but no one can say definitively that these are the direct causes of political violence. Furthermore, while ample research explores the role that gender socialization plays in political violence, relatively few have attempted to understand how the ideology of sexism may influence an individual's propensity for political violence; this is especially true in the case of benevolent sexism. My research hopes to address these claims and find an explanation for the relationships that have been established by previous researchers.

Bait and Hook: Why sexist attitudes increase the likelihood of political violence

As established by previous research, there exists a connection between sexist attitudes and a higher propensity for violence.[33] Meger and Johnston describe the backlash against gender equality and men's "thwarted" masculinity as a part of the mobilization strategies of violent extremist groups.[34] Misogynistic rhetoric is used as a key recruitment and radicalization strategy by extremist groups seeking new members. This suggests that sexist ideology plays a more direct role in motivating people to commit political violence, contradicting explanations that imply a

[33] Gentry, "Misogynistic terrorism," 2022.

[34] Melissa Johnston and Sara Meger, "The Linkages Between Violent Misogyny and Violent Extremism and Radicalization That Lead to Terrorism," OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, 2022), https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/d/c/525297.pdf

more tangential relationship. Trait aggression is clearly not the only connection between sexist attitudes and political violence.

Prior research into the connection between attitudes of sexism and political violence exhibits some pitfalls, namely in its focus on hostile sexism as a predictor while ignoring the role of benevolent sexism in political violence. Hostile sexism, characterized by a feeling of contempt towards women and a desire to force "deviant" women back into traditional gender roles, is inherently violent. The alarmingly high rates of domestic violence, workplace sexual harassment, and rape against women more than prove this; when individuals, men especially, believe that women belong in a sexual, domestic role, they are readily willing to use violence to enforce that belief.[35] Even when abusers are not explicitly motivated by the desire to oppress women, the outcome is the same: women who do not stay in their place are punished. Understanding this, it is easy to see how hostile sexism can be a misleading explanation for political violence. Violence against women is not just domestic but is also highly political in effect.[36] And hostile sexism is not merely an attitude held by some, but an inherently violent ideology. Therefore, predicting political violence with hostile sexism is similar to predicting violence with violence.

Much less attempts have been made to establish a connection between political violence and benevolent sexism. This neglect is perplexing; benevolent sexism, in its reverence of women who adhere to the gender hierarchy, naturally implies a lack of respect for women who do not, even if not expressly stated. While benevolent sexism might seem more "positive" and less inherently threatening than hostile sexism, it still upholds the gender hierarchy by incentivizing

[35] "Domestic Violence Statistics," *The Hotline,* July 4, 2023, https://www.thehotline.org/stakeholders/domestic-violence-statistics/#:~:Over%201%20in%203%30women,intimate%20partner%20in%20their%20lifetime; Klaus R. Scherer, "Appraisal Theory," *Handbook of Cognition and Emotion* (1999): 637-63.

[36] Gentry, "Misogynistic Terrorism."

women's adherence. So although hostile and benevolent sexism take different forms, they have strikingly similar functions in upholding gender roles.

It is evident that in order to gain a better understanding of the role that sexism plays in generalized political violence, a theory that relies on hostile sexism alone is not enough. Establishing and interpreting a connection between benevolent sexism, which shares similar ideological components to hostile sexism but without the expressed desire to enforce gender roles on unwilling others, can grant us much greater insight into whether this connection is significant and why it may exist. This study examines both hostile and benevolent sexism in order to better understand the influence of the whole of sexist ideology on political violence, rather than just examining the most violent aspects of sexist ideology.

To understand how hostile and benevolent sexism are connected to political violence, it is important to understand their differences. Hostile sexism is characterized by a feeling of contempt or anger against women who deviate from gendered norms. Women who occupy positions of power traditionally given to men, such as Nancy Pelosi and Kamala Harris, are especially likely to become targets of this ire. Those who hold attitudes of hostile sexism often attempt, consciously or not, to intimidate women into returning to a submissive societal role. The connection to political violence here is direct, as these feelings of contempt and anger can quickly be translated into violent acts against an individual or a society which encourages women's equality.

Benevolent sexism plays an opposite but complementary role in this violent cycle. Those who hold attitudes of benevolent sexism feel positively towards women who adhere to gendered norms, and are most often characterized by feeling a sense of protectionism or paternalism towards women. Women who play along with sexist ideals and adhere to gendered norms are

rewarded and protected by those holding these attitudes, which encourages women to fall in line with the patriarchy for their own safety. Paternalism is key to understanding the role benevolent sexism plays in violence; those who perpetuate violence against women may feel that they are intervening "for their own good," as they believe that women need to be guided.

Despite manifesting differently, hostile and benevolent sexism both rely on the assumption of a natural gender hierarchy, one in which men are socially superior to women, but women still fulfill a necessary role. This can be likened to the "spheres of influence" which permeated American culture for most of its history. Men were charged with leading the "public sphere," which included a domination of political discourse. Women, on the other hand, led the "private sphere," referring to maintaining order within the home. This hierarchy created a rigid social structure where each gender performed an essential role in society but did not enjoy the same amount of influence upon society.

Of course, American culture has come a long way since. Although women still endure a majority of the responsibility for the private sphere, the modern era has allowed many more opportunities for women to participate in the public sphere. Women now play a pivotal role in politics, even representing a majority of American voters.[37] Such power threatens the gender hierarchy that some have come to expect or even prefer. For those within that camp, modern advancements in women's rights have created the conditions for political radicalization as described in the literature review. A perceived societal injustice, that being the perceived downgrading of men from a socially dominant position to a socially equal position,[38] combined with a lack of confidence in state-sanctioned methods of protest, which stems from the fact that

[37] "Gender Differences in Voter Turnout," Center for American Women and Politics, 2023, https://cawp.rutgers.edu/facts/voters/gender-differences-voter-turnout

[38] This is not to say that men and women are truly equal in modern society; we still have a long way to go in terms of achieving true gender equality. However, those who support a gender hierarchy often argue that men and women are already equal, or even that women now hold *more* power than men, which is the sentiment I am intending to capture here.

women make up the majority of active voters, creates an environment in which those who favor a gender hierarchy cannot rely on state-sanctioned methods to express dissatisfaction. As a result, our society sees high rates of domestic violence and harassment against women.

Although it arguably should be, domestic violence is not considered to be inherently political, so the prior exploration only goes so far in theorizing why sexist attitudes predict expressly political violence. To this point, I argue that the connection lies within personality. Where other scholars have asserted that trait aggression is the main personality trait responsible for this connection, to which I do not disagree, I assert that social dominance orientation holds a similar but overlooked responsibility in motivating political violence.

Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) is a personality trait which measures the extent to which an individual prefers group-based hierarchy and inequality. Those scoring high in SDO express a preference for systems of group-based inequality in which one group socially and/or political rules over others.[39] Such individuals typically believe that the high-status group has "earned" their power, implying belief in a meritocratic system. In short, people high in SDO believe that some groups deserve to be socially superior to other groups.

The beliefs by those who hold hostile *and* benevolent sexist attitudes are highly consistent with SDO, in the sense that such attitudes enforce a necessary gender hierarchy. Hostile sexism directly punishes women who exist outside of traditional feminine roles, and especially those in positions historically held by men. Benevolent sexism encourages women to adhere to the gender hierarchy by offering protection to those that do. In contrast, benevolent sexism can perpetuate the idea that violent intervention is necessary to "protect" women from themselves in straying away from the gender hierarchy.

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[39] Arnold K. Ho et al, "The Nature of Social Dominance Orientation: Theorizing and measuring preferences for intergroup inequality using the new SDO scale.," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 109, no. 6 (2015): 1003.

But sexism is far from the only ideology that is consistent with SDO. In examining the ideology of some of the extreme political groups involved in the January 6th attack, the SDO connection is very clear. The Proud Boys, an alt-right, white supremacist group established by Gavin McInnes in 2016, provides the most straightforward example. McInnes and his followers describe themselves as "Western chauvinists" who revel in Western ideas and feel attacked for their whiteness. Many Proud Boys assert that it is actually white people who are the minority and that they are the ones who are truly suffering. McInnes himself is quoted saying, "We brought roads and infrastructure to India and they are still using them as toilets. Our criminals built nice roads in Australia but aboriginals keep using them as a bed. The next time someone bitches about colonization, the correct response is 'You're welcome.'"[40] Such a statement is a clear indictment of McInnes and his organizations' belief that white, Western culture is "superior," and therefore the individuals that created it are also superior and are doing the world a service by forcing their ideals onto the rest of the world. In other words, the Proud Boys clearly support a social hierarchy favoring whites.

To synthesize, I argue here that sexist attitudes are positively correlated with political violence via SDO. For example, an individual who scores high in social dominance orientation, and therefore prefers social hierarchy generally, is more likely to adopt attitudes of hostile and benevolent sexism. If such an individual then perceives a threat to the gender hierarchy, they may become radicalized to the point of violence in order to defend that hierarchy.If SDO truly is the motivator behind this relationship, then it is not just those who hold attitudes of hostile sexism who are at risk, but those holding benevolent sexist attitudes as well, as benevolent

[40] "Proud Boys," Southern Poverty Law Center (2021), https://splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/group/proud-boys.

sexism at its core is simply the rewarding of women who adhere to gender hierarchy where hostile sexism is the punishment of those who do not.

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Based on the above considerations, I have hypothesized a few relationships I expect to find. First, I hypothesize that *both* hostile sexism and benevolent sexism are positively correlated with the endorsement of political violence, not just hostile sexism. Next, I hypothesize that individuals who hold hostile or benevolent sexist beliefs express higher levels of SDO than those who do not. Finally, I expect that SDO is positively related to political violence, and that this relationship is mediated by both hostile and benevolent sexism.

Methodology

This research uses data from the American National Election Studies' (ANES) 2020 Time Series Study.[41] This data was chosen for its large sample size and its inclusion of questions assessing sexist attitudes, endorsement of political violence, and social dominance orientation. In order to test my hypothesis, I conduct a number of linear regressions between the following: 1) hostile sexism and political violence; 2) benevolent sexism and political violence; 3) SDO and

[41] "ANES 2020 Time Series Study Full Release [dataset and documentation]," *American National Election Studies,* February 10, 2021. https;//www.electionstudies.org.

political violence; 4) SDO and hostile sexism; 5) SDO and benevolent sexism; 6) SDO and political violence, mediated by hostile sexism; and 7) SDO and political violence, mediated by benevolent sexism. Mediational analyses use structural modeling proposed by Imai et al.[42]

"Hostile sexism" was operationalized as an index of two survey items. The first survey item states, "Many women interpret innocent remarks or acts as being sexist," and was coded as follows: strongly agree (1), agree somewhat (0.75), neither agree nor disagree (0.50), disagree somewhat (0.25), and disagree strongly (0). The second survey item states, "Women seek to gain power by getting control over men," and was coded identically to the previous item. A score of 1 indicates a strong attitude of hostile sexism, while a score of 0 indicates no hostile sexism. These items were chosen due to their close adherence to the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory, a questionnaire specifically designed by Glick and Fiske to measure an individual's hostile and benevolent sexist attitudes.[43]

The ANES study does not include survey items to measure benevolent sexism that are directly in line with the questions in the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory, so survey items were chosen due to the participants' ability to express a positive association with hierarchical gender roles. For this, the survey item, "Do you think it is better, worse, or makes no difference for the family as a whole if the man works outside the home and the woman takes care of the home and family?" was used, and coded as the following: much better (1), somewhat better (0.83), slightly better (0.66), makes no difference (0.5), slightly worse (0.33), somewhat worse (0.167), or much worse (0). A score of one indicates a strong attitude of benevolent sexism, while a score of 0 indicates no attitude of benevolent sexism. This question was chosen to measure benevolent

[42] Kosuke Imai, Dustin Tingley, and Luke Keele, "A General Approach to Causal Mediation Analysis," *Psychological Methods* 15, no. 4 (2010): 309-334.

[43] "Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI)," Psychological Scale, January 31, 2022, https://scales.arabpsychology.com/s/ambivalent-sexism-inventory-asi/.

sexism because it allows the participant to express a positive opinion about the gender roles being expressed in the question.

Two survey items were indexed to measure social dominance orientation: “It is not really that big a problem if some people have more of a chance in life than others,” and “this country would be better off if we worried less about how equal people are.” Both questions were coded as follows: agree strongly (1), agree somewhat (0.75), neither agree nor disagree (0.5), disagree somewhat (0.25), or disagree strongly (0). As with the other items, the higher the score, the higher the individual’s SDO. These questions were selected because they allow participants to signal whether they believe equality is important or not, as those who score high in SDO often believe that inequality is necessary.

Finally, two questions were used to measure different types of political violence. The first, and most direct question, asks simply, “How much do you feel it is justified for people to use violence to pursue their political goals in this country?” coded as not at all (0), a little (0.25), a moderate amount (0.5), a lot (0.75), or a great deal (1). This survey item is the best for measuring an individual’s willingness to endorse political violence; however, due to the taboo nature of political violence, it is entirely possible that people may misconstrue their willingness to support it due to social pressure to do so. To account for this, a second, more indirect, question was used.

The second survey item used asks, “What is the best way to deal with the problem of urban unrest and rioting?” and was scored on a seven point scale (recoded to run from 0-1), ranging from “solve problems of racism and police violence” (0) to “use all available force to maintain law and order” (1). This question does not directly mention the respondent’s willingness to commit or accept political violence, but the phrase “use all available force”

implies an endorsement of the use of state violence for political reasons. Because this question is less direct than the former, I expect participants to be more forthcoming with their responses; however, it should be noted that the former is a much more direct item for measuring endorsement of political violence than the latter. Additionally, because these questions imply different types of political violence, one being committed by individuals with the other being committed by the state, I have analyzed each question separately as opposed to combining them into a single variable. The first question will be labeled "political violence," while the second will be labeled "state violence."

In addition to these items, I also controlled for partisanship, gender, household income, and race.

Results

As shown in Table 1, results revealed mixed support for the theory that attitudes of hostile sexism increase an individual's likelihood of endorsing political violence. When observing the endorsement of political violence generally, there is a roughly 1-point increase in support for those with stronger attitudes of hostile sexism. This relationship is both statistically and substantively insignificant, however, and certainly does not suggest that hostile sexism plays a major role in influencing a person's likelihood of endorsing political violence.

The relationship between hostile sexism and the endorsement of state violence, on the other hand, is much stronger. An individual is about 25 percentage points more likely to endorse state violence if they score high in hostile sexism, which represents a dramatic increase in support. These results suggest that hostile sexism *is* strongly related to particular types of political violence, such as state-sanctioned violence.

Table 1. The effect of hostile sexism on the endorsement of political violence (general and state).

Predictor	Endorsement of Political Violence	Endorsement of State Violence
Hostile Sexism	0.010	0.252**
	(0.015)	(0.023)
Partisanship	-0.006**	0.094**
	(0.002)	(0.003)
Gender	0.002	0.003
	(0.007)	(0.011)
Income	-0.004**	0.001
	(0.001)	(0.001)
Race	-0.067**	0.056**
White	(0.010)	(0.015)
Black	-0.017	-0.061**
	(0.017)	(0.021)
Constant.	0.202**	-1.100**
	(0.014)	(0.020)

*Notes. Standard errors are in parentheses. **p<0.01; *p<0.05*

While not as strong as with hostile sexism, I found similar results when examining the relationship between benevolent sexism and the endorsement of political violence, with one notable exception. Whereas hostile sexism has virtually no relationship with the endorsement of general political violence, benevolent sexism reveals a *negative* relationship; there is a 4-point decrease in endorsement of political violence the stronger a person indicates holding attitudes of political sexism. The relationship between benevolent sexism and the endorsement of state violence tells a much different story. Those holding strong attitudes of benevolent sexism are about 17 percentage points more likely to endorse state violence. Despite being a slightly weaker relationship than that with hostile sexism, the substantive effect is just as staggering. As

mentioned above, these results suggest that sexist attitudes are very influential when considering particular types of political violence.

Table 2. The effect of benevolent sexism on the endorsement of political violence (general and state).

Predictor	Endorsement of Political Violence	Endorsement of State Violence
Benevolent Sexism	-0.042*	0.171**
	(0.018)	(0.027)
Partisanship	-0.005**	0.099**
	(0.002)	(0.002)
Gender	0.005	0.011
	(0.007)	(0.011)
Income	-0.004**	0.000
	(0.001)	(0.001)
Race	-0.068**	0.045**
White	(0.011)	(0.015)
Black	-0.013	-0.067**
	(0.018)	(0.022)
Constant.	0.226**	-0.105**
	(0.017)	(0.023)

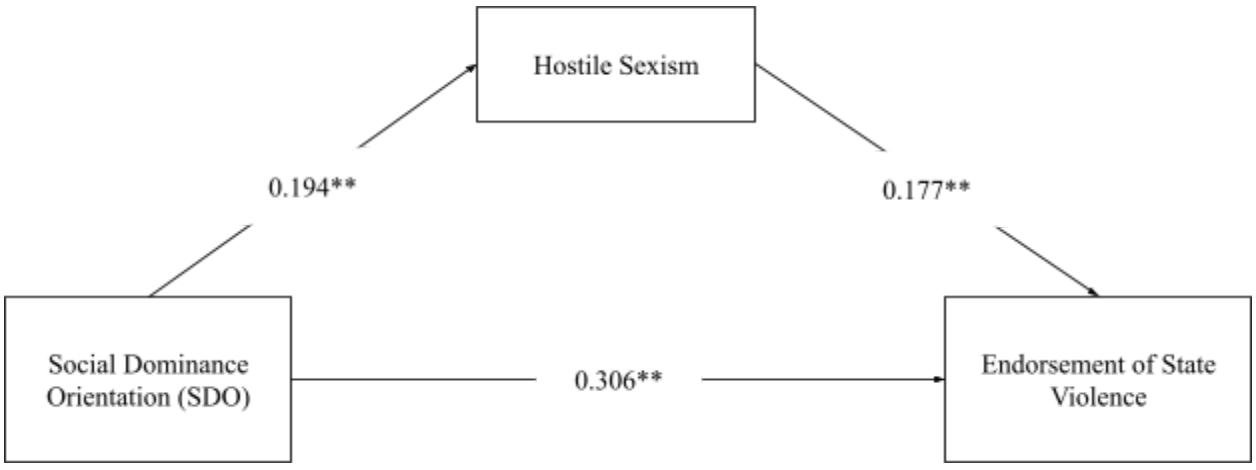
*Notes. Standard errors are in parentheses. **p<0.01; *p<0.05*

These results show mixed support for my theory. Using the direct measure of political violence, there is little evidence that either hostile or benevolent sexism is responsible for the spike in partisan-motivated violence over the past few years. This is inconsistent with the theory laid out above. Yet there is also evidence that the direct measure of political violence obscures a deeper truth. There is strong support for my theory when we consider the appropriateness of state violence to maintain order and the social hierarchy. And although the estimated effect of

benevolent sexism on violence is modestly smaller than that of hostile sexism, it still results in a substantively massive and statistically significant relationship.

Including the influence of SDO into the equation yields fascinating results. Figures 1 and 2 show the relationship between SDO and state violence, mediated by hostile and benevolent sexism. Figure 1 shows that SDO has a strong, positive relationship with hostile sexism and a strong mediated effect on the endorsement of state violence; it should be noted, however, that the direct effect of SDO on state violence is much stronger than the mediated effect. These results suggest that SDO does play its part in connecting hostile sexism to the endorsement of state violence, but only provides a small part of the whole picture. The strong direct effect hints that a different underlying factor may play a more influential role than SDO in correlating strong attitudes of hostile sexism with the endorsement of political violence.

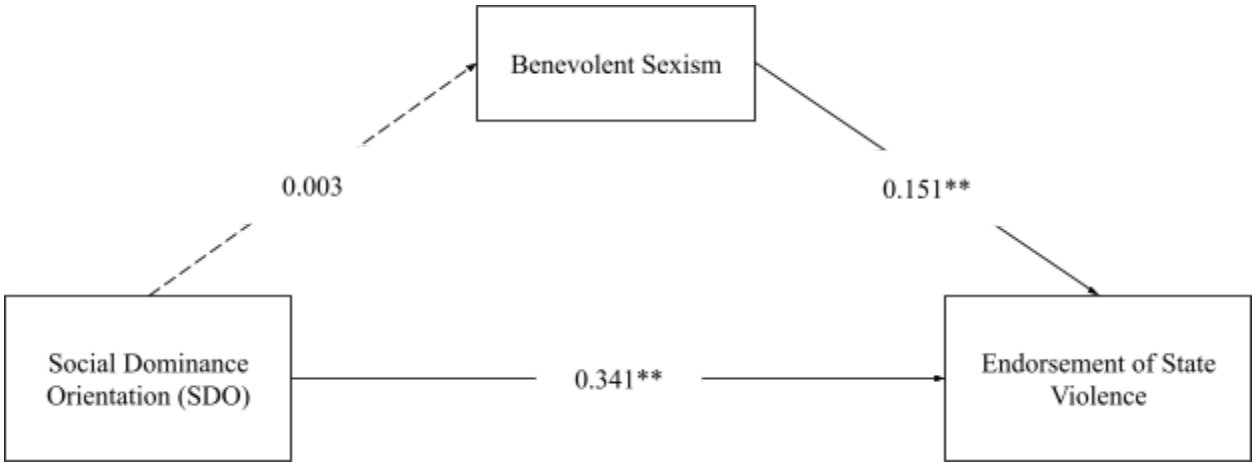
Figure 1. *The effect of social dominance orientation on the endorsement of state violence, mediated by hostile sexism.*



When using benevolent sexism as a mediator, there is minimal influence of SDO on benevolent sexism. Like with hostile sexism, there is a strong, statistically significant relationship between benevolent sexism and the endorsement of state violence, and SDO and the

endorsement of state violence; however, there is no mediated effect observed. Interestingly, these results suggest that the relationship between benevolent sexism and state violence is caused by different underlying factors than the relationship between hostile sexism and state violence. These results both reinforce the necessity of separating hostile and benevolent sexism when analyzing their distinct roles in political violence and reveal the importance of including *both* hostile and benevolent sexism in such discussions.

Figure 2. *The effect of social dominance orientation on the endorsement of state violence, mediated by benevolent sexism.*



Discussion

Overall, I find support for the theory that benevolent sexism is a key, and often overlooked, ingredient in the motivation to commit political violence to maintain the social hierarchy. Yet the relationships are more complicated and nuanced than previously thought. There is strong evidence suggesting that holding both hostile and benevolent sexist attitudes does have a significant, positive impact on an individual's willingness to endorse state violence. Additionally, I do find that the effect of SDO on state violence is strong and significantly mediated by sexist attitudes. Due to the weakness of the mediated effect, however, I stop short of

saying that SDO is the primary reason why hostile and benevolent sexism predict the endorsement of political violence.

While I did find support for the idea that sexist attitudes predict the endorsement of state violence, I did not find the same relationship when predicting the endorsement of general political violence. There are a few potential explanations for this difference: the simplest explanation is that people are simply more reluctant to express their violent tendencies when asked directly than when the question is phrased indirectly. Another reason for these results could be that those who hold sexist beliefs only support state-sanctioned violence; if the idea that their endorsement of such violence is motivated by SDO is true, then this could be because these individuals feel that, in the social hierarchy, the government has the right to use violence to enforce its will where other groups do not.

Limitations

This research suffered some limitations which could have impacted the results in unintended ways. Firstly, individuals with extreme political opinions are often reluctant to share those beliefs with researchers out of fear that their responses could be used against them in the future. Because of this, there is the possibility that a number of people who *are* willing to endorse political violence lied in their response due to the taboo nature of such an endorsement.

I was also limited by the survey items that were available through the ANES. The ANES had limited options when choosing items to assess endorsement of political violence and in assessing attitudes of benevolent sexism. This is especially the case for the benevolent sexism items; had I had access to data that asked questions directly taken from the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory, I would be able to be more confident in my assertion that the items I chose accurately measure benevolent sexist attitudes. Unfortunately, this was not the case for this particular study.

Finally, it is important to note that political violence is committed by relatively few people. It is possible that so few participants were willing to personally commit violence that the sample size was not large enough to fully assess the relationship between sexist attitudes, SDO, and political violence.

Conclusions

While I did not find support for every aspect of my theory, this study finds that *both* hostile and benevolent sexism play a substantial role in individuals' willingness to endorse political violence, particularly state violence. This is incredibly important given previous research's exclusion of benevolent sexism from analysis. Notably, however, SDO seems to only act as an underlying motivator of the relationship between hostile sexism and political violence, rather than with both forms of sexism. This suggests that although both are related to an increased support in political violence, the underlying causes of these relationships are different. Future research should consider forming distinct theories for hostile sexism and benevolent sexism's unique relationships with support for political violence.

The results of this study represent the salience of misogyny in American politics, especially now, in an era where men are doing notably worse than their female peers professionally, academically, and personally.[44] While sexism in America has always existed, the current crisis of masculinity has created a set of circumstances ripe for fostering contempt and dissatisfaction, putting women, and our democracy itself, at greater risk. It is imperative, now more than ever, that something is done to address gendered political tension before the consequences become too great to contain.

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[44] Andrew Anthony, "Of Boys and Men by Richard Reeves Review - The descent of man," *The Guardian* (2022), https://www.theguardian.com/books/2022/oct/03/of-boys-and-men-why-the-modern-male-is-struggling-by-richard-reeves-review-the-descent-of-man

Fortunately, researchers have spent decades exploring methods for reducing attitudes of sexism. Among the approaches explored, increasing awareness of gender inequality through diversity and equality courses and male peer intervention are the most effective at identifying and curtailing problematic sexist attitudes and behaviors.[45] Using these approaches could prove instrumental in coaxing individuals off the ledge of political violence before they even step upon it through early intervention. Moving forward, further research into the role that sexist attitudes play in political violence will aid in the effectiveness of these programs at modifying problematic behaviors.

[45] Kim A. Case, "Raising Male Privilege Awareness and Reducing Sexism: An evaluation of diversity courses," *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 31, no. 4 (2007): 426-435; Benjamin J. Drury and Cheryl R. Kaiser, "Allies Against Sexism: The role of men in confronting sexism," *Journal of Social Issues* 70, no. 4 (2014): 637-652; Christopher Kilmartin, Tempe Smith, Alison Green, Harriotte Heinzen, Michael Kuchler, and David Kolar, "A Real Time Social Norms Intervention to Reduce Male Sexism," *Sex Roles* 59 (2008): 264-273.

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