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# Gendered Disinformation and Technology-Facilitated Violence Against Women in Politics: Causal Mechanisms, Democratic Effects, and Institutional Responses

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ABSTRACT

This comprehensive literature review investigates the operational dynamics of gendered disinformation and technology-facilitated violence against female politicians. These phenomena are conceptualized as interconnected digital assaults that systematically constrain electoral participation, candidacy viability, substantive representation, and democratic voice. In response to the pervasive conceptual fragmentation characterizing current scholarship on disinformation, online gender-based abuse, violence against women in politics, and technology-facilitated violence, this research synthesizes empirical evidence from seven peer-reviewed journal articles. The geographic scope of this corpus encompasses the United Kingdom, Italy, Japan, Lebanon, New Zealand, broader European environments, alongside a comprehensive global Delphi study. Employing a qualitative interpretive comparative methodology and structured thematic synthesis, the analysis delineates recurrent typologies of attack, notably gendered disinformation, misogynistic harassment, sexualized abuse, doxxing, and coordinated platform-enabled campaigns. Furthermore, it systematically maps the primary causal mechanisms driving these assaults, specifically reputational delegitimation, overt intimidation, cumulative psychological burden, forced self-censorship, algorithmic platform amplification, and institutional abandonment. Analytical findings demonstrate that these digital incursions do not merely represent incidental online incivility. Instead, they operate as profoundly consequential political mechanisms of systemic exclusion that artificially inflate the personal and professional costs of female public visibility, fundamentally distort representative communication, and erode democratic inclusion. While institutional countermeasures exist, contemporary scholarship generally evaluates them as highly fragmented, predominantly reactive, and insufficiently scrutinized. The article ultimately concludes that achieving a robust understanding of how digital gendered harm reconfigures women's political representation requires significantly stronger conceptual integration and the systematic empirical assessment of institutional interventions

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## INTRODUCTION

Contemporary politics has been profoundly restructured by the expansion of digital platforms into the core infrastructures of campaigning, public communication, representation, and political contestation. As political actors increasingly rely on social media, microtargeting, digital advertising, and platform-mediated interaction, democratic practice has become embedded in socio-technical environments governed not by public institutions alone but also by opaque commercial architectures (Battista, 2024; García-Orosa, 2021; Lorenz-Spreen et al.,

2022; Stier et al., 2018). This transformation has lowered the costs of participation and widened opportunities for mobilisation, yet it has also produced new vulnerabilities related to visibility, exclusion, symbolic violence, and asymmetrical power between platforms, elites, and citizens (Deseriis, 2020; Lobera & Portos, 2020; Miller & Vaccari, 2020). In this setting, democratic inclusion increasingly depends on platform logics that can amplify conflict, distort public attention, and expose already marginalised actors to intensified harm.

These structural changes are especially consequential for women in politics, who remain underrepresented in formal institutions while also facing disproportionate levels of digital abuse. The draft indicates that women hold only about one quarter of parliamentary seats globally, with major regional disparities and persistent structural barriers despite progress in education and labour participation (Bellani & Hidalgo-Hidalgo, 2025; Bravo-Ortega et al., 2020; Clark & Kroska, 2024; Reynolds, 1999). At the same time, quantitative evidence shows that digital violence against women in politics is extensive and gendered in character: in Victoria, 82% of parliamentarians reported harassment, 85% reported threats of harm, and 85% of women MPs reported gender-based abuse; in New Zealand, 96% reported social media harassment, with women facing higher risks of sexualised abuse and family-targeted threats (Every-Palmer et al., 2024; Phillips et al., 2023). These patterns indicate that digital hostility is not incidental, but part of the political environment within which women must campaign, speak, and govern.

The literature has therefore moved beyond generic notions of online abuse toward more precise frameworks such as online gender-based violence, technology-facilitated gender-based violence, violence against women in politics, and gendered disinformation (Backe et al., 2018; Bansal et al., 2023; Gehrke & Amit-Danhi, 2025; Henry & Powell, 2018; Koch et al., 2025). This conceptual shift matters because it reframes digital attacks not merely as hostile online behaviour, but as politically consequential practices rooted in patriarchal power relations and designed to constrain women's democratic presence. Within this broader evolution, gendered disinformation is especially important because it links misogynistic abuse to manipulative information practices such as deepfakes, coordinated rumours, malinformation, and crowd harassment that seek to delegitimise women as political actors (Gehrke & Amit-Danhi, 2025; Jones, 2021).

Existing studies further suggest that these attacks operate through identifiable causal mechanisms, including reputational delegitimation, intimidation, psychological burden, self-censorship, platform amplification, and candidate withdrawal (Collignon & Rüdig, 2021; Eady & Rasmussen, 2024; Koch et al., 2025; Krook & Sanín, 2019). Yet the literature remains fragmented. Definitions vary across adjacent fields, cross-study comparison remains weak, causal evidence is still limited, and institutional responses by parties, parliaments, electoral bodies, platforms, regulators, and law enforcement are more often proposed than rigorously evaluated (Bansal et al., 2023; Biroli, 2018; Rigotti & McGlynn, 2025; Sheikh & Rogers, 2023). This review addresses that gap by integrating these dispersed strands into a coherent

framework that links forms of attack, causal mechanisms, democratic effects, and the uneven effectiveness of institutional responses.

Against this broader background, the central issue is not merely the existence of digital hostility toward women in politics, but the lack of an integrated explanation of how such attacks operate as politically consequential mechanisms of exclusion. Existing scholarship on gendered disinformation and technology-facilitated violence against women in politics remains fragmented across adjacent fields, including violence against women in politics, online gender-based abuse, technology-facilitated violence, and disinformation studies. Although these bodies of literature offer valuable insights, they employ different conceptual vocabularies, analytical focuses, and evaluative criteria, resulting in only a partial understanding of how these attacks are constituted, how they interact, and how they produce political harm. This fragmentation weakens cumulative knowledge about their effects on women's participation, candidacy, representation, and strategic behaviour, while also obscuring how institutions respond across different arenas of democratic governance. In response, this literature review seeks to develop a more integrated analytical understanding of digital gendered harm in politics by examining how gendered disinformation and technology-facilitated violence function as interconnected forms of attack. Specifically, it aims to identify their principal forms, explain the causal mechanisms through which they generate political consequences, assess their effects on women's democratic presence and representational capacity, and evaluate how institutional responses are understood across political, regulatory, and platform-based settings. This systematic inquiry is structured and operationalized around the following research questions:

1. How does the extant literature classify and explicate the forms and causal mechanisms of gendered disinformation and technology-facilitated violence against women in politics?
2. How does current scholarship evaluate the political ramifications of these digital attacks on women's electoral participation, candidacy, and substantive representation, alongside the efficacy of subsequent institutional mitigation strategies?

The principal novelty of this study resides in its endeavor to synthesize distinct bodies of scholarship that are frequently siloed within contemporary discourse. Specifically, it integrates literature concerning gendered disinformation, technology-facilitated violence, violence against women in politics, and institutional response frameworks. Rather than conceptualizing digital attacks against female politicians as isolated incidents of online abuse, this review frames them as politically structured mechanisms of systemic exclusion that actively condition democratic participation, public visibility, and representational opportunity. Ultimately, this research transcends mere descriptive mapping by constructing an integrated analytical framework that explicitly links attack typologies, causal pathways, political consequences, and institutional countermeasures. By advancing this comprehensive structure, the study directly resolves several persistent vulnerabilities within the broader literature. These unresolved issues notably include definitional fragmentation, the deficit of rigorous cross-study comparison, and the historical lack of cohesive theoretical integration.

## Methodology

This research utilized a qualitative literature review design, incorporating a structured thematic synthesis, to investigate the operational dynamics of gendered disinformation and technology-facilitated violence against women in politics. The analytical corpus consisted exclusively of seven pre-selected, peer-reviewed journal articles. These studies encompass diverse geographic and operational contexts, specifically the United Kingdom, Japan, Italy, New Zealand, Lebanon, broader European disinformation environments, and a comprehensive global expert inquiry. Given the pronounced methodological heterogeneity of this evidence base, the present article foregoes statistical aggregation. The selected studies utilize highly varied approaches, including discourse-oriented case study analysis, qualitative thematic analysis of social media data, corpus-based discourse analysis, interview research, coded analysis of information disorders, survey research, and Delphi consensus methodologies. Consequently, this study adopts an interpretive comparative approach perfectly suited for identifying recurring empirical patterns, conceptual divergences, and cross-study linkages within a highly fragmented academic field.

The primary unit of analysis for this review was the individual journal article. Inclusion criteria required studies to directly address at least one of four core elements concerning female politicians or politically exposed women in public life. These elements comprised forms of digital attack, underlying causal mechanisms, subsequent political effects, and institutional responses. During the extraction phase, the review systematically recorded specific data points for each article, namely author and publication year, geographic or platform context, study design, target population, specific forms of abuse or disinformation examined, and primary findings relevant to the dual research questions. Maintaining analytical consistency necessitated retaining the original terminology utilized by the source studies, particularly regarding highly contested concepts such as gendered disinformation, online abuse, and technology-facilitated violence. Simultaneously, these disparate findings were meticulously grouped into a unified comparative framework. This methodological decision was imperative, as the reviewed literature explicitly acknowledges severe definitional fragmentation and the conspicuous absence of a standardized conceptual vocabulary.

The analytical process progressed through three distinct stages. Initially, the seven studies underwent comparative reading to isolate the primary forms of attack documented across the literature, including gendered disinformation, sustained harassment, misogynistic speech, sexualized abuse, doxxing, and coordinated platform-enabled attacks. Subsequently, these findings were systematically coded into recurrent causal mechanisms. These mechanisms encompassed reputational delegitimation, overt intimidation, cumulative psychological burden, forced self-censorship, algorithmic platform amplification, and institutional abandonment. Finally, the coded data underwent synthesis across three distinct levels of political consequence. This synthesis evaluated the effects on individual female politicians or candidates, the impacts on organizational and institutional settings, and the broader ramifications for representative democracy. This overarching analytic strategy empowered the

review to seamlessly connect attack typologies, causal mechanisms, political harms, and institutional countermeasures within a singular framework, all while remaining strictly faithful to the methodological diversity and inherent limitations of the seven-study evidence base.

## Results and Discussion

### *A.* Study Characteristics and Overview of the Reviewed Literature

To establish the empirical and analytical scope of this review, it is first necessary to map the characteristics of the seven journal articles selected for analysis.

**Table 1. Study Characteristics of the Reviewed Literature on Gendered Disinformation and Technology-Facilitated Violence Against Women in Politics**

| No | Study | Country / Context | Main Focus / Key Findings |
|---|---|---|---|
| **1** | Tzvetkova, 2024, *Applying a Gender Lens to the Study of Misinformation and Disinformation* (Tzvetkova, 2024) | Bulgaria, Italy, and broader European disinformation contexts | Examines gendered misinformation and disinformation as attacks on women in public life. Shows that gendered falsehoods reinforce stereotypes, silence women, and weaken democratic inclusion. |
| **2** | Harmer & Southern, 2021, *Digital Microaggressions and Everyday Othering* (Harmer & Southern, 2021) | United Kingdom; Twitter; women MPs | Analyses abusive tweets sent to women MPs. Finds that digital microaggressions normalize sexism and racialized exclusion, making online political space more hostile to women. |
| **3** | Koukopoulos, Janickyj, & Tanczer, 2025, *Defining and Conceptualizing Technology-Facilitated Abuse* (Koukopoulos et al., 2026) | Global Delphi study across sectors | Clarifies the concept of technology-facilitated abuse. Finds broad agreement on harm, consent, and perpetrator behavior as core elements, while gendered and disinformation-related dimensions remain debated. |
| **4** | Riedl, El-Masri, Trauthig, & Woolley, 2025, *Infrastructural Platform Violence* (Riedl et al., 2025) | Lebanon; WhatsApp; women and queer journalists/activists | Explores abuse enabled by platform design and weak safety systems. Finds that WhatsApp was used for doxxing, threats, and harassment, producing fear, exhaustion, and self-censorship. |
| **5** | Fuchs & Schäfer, 2020, *Normalizing Misogyny* (Fuchs & Schäfer, 2020) | Japan; Twitter; female politicians | Studies misogynistic and sexist abuse against female politicians. Finds persistent |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | hostility targeting appearance, private life, and gender identity, contributing to the normalization of online misogyny in politics. |
| **6** | Sportelli & D'Errico, 2025, *Does Disinformation Toward Women Politicians Reflect Gender Stereotypes?* (Sportelli & D'Errico, 2025) | Italy; female political leaders; 2014–2024 | Examines false and misleading content targeting women politicians. Finds that disinformation reproduces gender stereotypes, especially around private life, appearance, and leadership competence. |
| **7** | Every-Palmer, Hansby, & Barry-Walsh, 2024, *Stalking, Harassment, Gendered Abuse, and Violence Towards Politicians* (Every-Palmer et al., 2024) | New Zealand; MPs; COVID-19 and recovery period | Assesses harassment toward politicians across online and offline settings. Finds that women MPs face more gendered and sexualized abuse, with serious emotional, security, and democratic consequences. |

As shown in Table 1, the reviewed literature covers a diverse but still limited set of geographical and analytical contexts, including the United Kingdom, Italy, Japan, Lebanon, New Zealand, broader European settings, and one global Delphi study. Across these studies, the most consistent focus lies in identifying forms of digitally mediated abuse directed at women in visible political or public roles, including gendered disinformation, misogynistic hate speech, digital microaggressions, coordinated harassment, doxxing, sexualised abuse, and broader forms of technology-facilitated violence. The reviewed studies also indicate that women politicians, women members of parliament, women public figures, and adjacent politically exposed actors such as journalists and activists are examined primarily as targets of attacks that seek to undermine legitimacy, visibility, and participation. Methodologically, the seven studies reflect a mixed but uneven pattern, combining qualitative thematic analysis, corpus-based analysis, interview research, survey evidence, conceptual development, and content analysis. At the same time, the overall profile of the literature suggests that current scholarship is more developed in documenting forms of attack and their immediate consequences than in systematically evaluating institutional responses. This pattern provides the basis for reading the findings through two core dimensions developed in this review, namely the mechanisms through which digital attacks produce political harm and the political effects and institutional responses that follow.

### *B.* Forms of Gendered Digital Attacks and Their Causal Mechanisms

Across the seven reviewed studies, gendered digital attacks against women in politics are not treated as random incivility or merely generic online hostility. Rather, the literature classifies them as politically consequential forms of abuse that work by targeting women's legitimacy, authority, and visibility in public life. At the broadest level, the evidence points to

two partially overlapping clusters. The first is content-centered attack, especially gendered disinformation and other forms of misleading, fabricated, manipulated, or stereotype-laden communication that portray women as unfit for leadership or public voice. The second is abuse-centered attack, including overt harassment, sexualized abuse, stalking, doxxing, threats, and other forms of technology-facilitated violence directed at women in public roles. Koukopoulos et al. (2025) are especially useful in showing that the field already recognizes a wide repertoire of related harms, including cyberstalking, image-based sexual abuse, online harassment, online misogyny, online hate speech, trolling, and abuse toward public figures, even if the precise boundaries between technology-facilitated abuse and disinformation remain debated. This makes clear that the reviewed literature is working with a spectrum of harms rather than a single behavior type.

The content-based side of this spectrum is most visible in the studies of gendered disinformation. Tzvetkova (2024) shows that gendered disinformation relies on false or misleading narratives rooted in misogynistic frameworks and stereotypes, often with some degree of coordination and clear political intent. Sportelli and D'Errico (2025) similarly demonstrate that information disorders targeting women politicians are not neutral factual distortions, but stereotype-reproducing narratives that disproportionately attack communion, morality, private life, professional competence, aesthetic appearance, and physical competence. In that sense, fabricated content, misleading content, satire, parody, and manipulated representation function as mechanisms of reputational delegitimation. They recode female political presence as immoral, unserious, incompetent, overly emotional, or publicly suspect. The same logic is visible in Harmer and Southern's (2021) account of microaggressions that frame women MPs as unqualified and unwelcome, and in Fuchs and Schäfer's (2020) finding that abusive discourse toward female politicians frequently targets appearance, private life, and gender identity. Even where deepfakes are not the main empirical focus of this seven-study set, Harmer and Southern explicitly situate cheapfakes and deepfakes within the wider repertoire of semiotic violence against women in politics, which suggests that manipulated visual content belongs to the same logic of symbolic degradation and public undermining.

The second cluster consists of personal threat and targeted abuse. Here the reviewed studies identify a more direct repertoire of coercive harm: overt misogynistic insults, sexualized comments, rape threats, threats toward family members, stalking, doxxing, image-based abuse, extortion, unsolicited sexual material, and account-targeting tactics. Riedl et al. (2025) are particularly important because they show that WhatsApp groups can act both as sites of abuse and as launchpads for coordinated attacks through doxxing, non-consensual sharing of personal information or images, conspiracy narratives about individuals, and rape or death threats. Every-Palmer et al. (2024) add a parliamentary perspective, showing that women MPs were disproportionately exposed to gendered abuse, sexualized comments, threats of sexual violence, and threats toward their families. Harmer and Southern (2021) bridge overt abuse and subtle abuse by showing that everyday sexism, victim blaming, and reverse discrimination

discourse are interwoven and mutually reinforcing. Fuchs and Schäfer (2020) likewise indicate that abuse is not always maximally explicit, since irony, hostile insinuation, and persistent negative commentary can normalize misogyny while remaining embedded in routine political communication. Taken together, these studies distinguish among content-based attacks, targeted threat-based attacks, and networked or amplified attacks in which multiple actors, groups, or communicative affordances intensify the harm.

The causal mechanisms identified across the literature are strikingly convergent. First, reputational delegitimation works by attaching women politicians to narratives of incompetence, immorality, promiscuity, disloyalty, or ridicule, thereby weakening their authority before audiences even engage their substantive politics. Second, intimidation works through explicit threats, doxxing, and sexualized violence that make political participation feel physically risky. Third, psychological burden accumulates through the constant repetition of abuse, microaggressions, and hostile monitoring, producing fear, emotional exhaustion, stress, trauma, and hypervigilance. Fourth, self-censorship emerges when women withdraw, avoid platforms, moderate their own visibility, or calculate the costs of speaking. Fifth, platform amplification matters because polarization, online disinhibition, weak moderation, encrypted cascade dynamics, and platform-specific affordances can extend the reach and durability of abuse. Sixth, institutional abandonment intensifies harm when platforms are experienced as unreliable stewards of safety and when formal support systems are perceived as insufficient. Riedl et al. (2025) conceptualize this most directly as infrastructural platform violence, where harm is propagated not only on platforms but also by platforms through neglect.

What links these mechanisms to broader political harm is that they make women's democratic presence appear conditional, precarious, and costly. The reviewed studies repeatedly suggest that these attacks can discourage women from seeking office, push representatives to disengage or leave, make everyday political work harder, and distort who can participate safely and credibly in democratic institutions. Gendered disinformation is therefore not only about falsehood, and technology-facilitated abuse is not only about interpersonal cruelty. In this body of literature, both operate as exclusionary political mechanisms that constrain representation by undermining women's credibility, increasing the burdens of visibility, and normalizing a communicative environment in which women are present in politics but never fully accepted as legitimate political actors.

### *C.* Political Effects on Women's Participation, Representation, and Institutional Responses

Across the seven reviewed studies, the political effects of gendered disinformation and technology-facilitated abuse are assessed not as isolated harms to individual women, but as pressures that reshape whether, how, and on what terms women can appear in political life. At the individual level, the literature converges on a clear pattern: sustained exposure to gendered abuse, sexualized threats, reputational attacks, and stereotype-based disinformation raises the cost of political participation, weakens willingness to remain publicly visible, and can deter

both candidacy and continued office-holding. Harmer and Southern (2021) explicitly argue that digital microaggressions may discourage women from seeking office or compel representatives to leave, while Fuchs and Schäfer (2020) similarly suggest that the constant abusive "noise floor" surrounding female politicians can lead women to quit politics and functions as a hindrance to entering politics in the first place. Every-Palmer et al. (2024) reinforce this conclusion by showing that escalating harassment produces fear, emotional stress, and altered behaviour, with implications for whether elected representatives remain engaged with communities or continue in politics at all. In related public-facing contexts, Riedl et al. (2025) show that intimidation and harassment can successfully silence women and queer journalists and activists, producing self-censorship and withdrawal from the public sphere. Taken together, these studies indicate that the attacks affect participation by making visibility politically costly rather than democratically enabling (Harmer and Southern, 2021; Fuchs and Schäfer, 2020; Every-Palmer et al., 2024; Riedl et al., 2025).

The corpus also shows that the effects extend beyond the question of whether women participate at all, and shape how they represent, communicate, and perform political roles once they are present. Harmer and Southern (2021) show that women MPs are almost required to remain on social media for campaigning and everyday representative work, yet the same platforms expose them to cumulative hostility that drains time, cognitive energy, and communicative capacity. Their analysis suggests that women face a strategic bind: disengaging from digital platforms carries political costs, but remaining visible exposes them to forms of online violence that distort political communication itself. Sportelli and D'Errico (2025) add that information disorders targeting female politicians can blur the evaluation of women's political and institutional competence, while also reinforcing the association of women with the private sphere rather than public and political life. Tzvetkova (2024) likewise shows that gendered disinformation relies on misogynistic stereotypes that cast women as untrustworthy, unqualified, unintelligent, or excessively emotional, thereby undermining credibility before substantive political claims are even heard. The political effect, therefore, is not only exclusion from office, but a distortion of democratic voice in which women remain visible yet are persistently recoded as less legitimate political actors (Harmer and Southern, 2021; Sportelli and D'Errico, 2025; Tzvetkova, 2024).

At the organizational and institutional level, the reviewed studies suggest that these harms spill over into the environments in which representation is practiced. Every-Palmer et al. (2024) show that abuse affects not only MPs but also their staff and families, while parliamentary support systems were often perceived as inadequate relative to the scale and severity of the risk. Staff were required to absorb the emotional labour of moderating hateful content, and respondents reported insufficient resources in security, training, cybersafety, and specialist support. Riedl et al. (2025) identify a similar pattern in platformed public work, where the burden of staying safe is individualized and victims are pushed toward self-protection, reporting, blocking, and psychological adaptation rather than receiving reliable institutional protection. Harmer and Southern (2021) further suggest that women representatives must

devote time and energy to preventative coping strategies instead of substantive political work. In this sense, gendered digital attacks do not only injure individual women; they also reorganize institutional routines by transferring the costs of abuse onto women, their staff, and their immediate professional environments. This makes the problem organizational as much as personal, because the conditions for performing representative work become structurally less equal (Harmer and Southern, 2021; Every-Palmer et al., 2024; Riedl et al., 2025).

The democratic implications are correspondingly broader. Several studies explicitly frame these attacks as threats to representative democracy rather than merely interpersonal abuse. Harmer and Southern (2021) describe digital microaggressions as damaging for democracy because they threaten the participation of women and minorities in formal political institutions. Every-Palmer et al. (2024) argue that harassment carries psychosocial costs not only for victims but also for democratic processes, and warn that reduced engagement or exit from politics would produce considerable institutional damage. Riedl et al. (2025) make the same point in especially direct terms, arguing that when emotional exhaustion, anxiety, and reputational harm drive self-censorship or withdrawal, democracy suffers. Tzvetkova (2024) further broadens the point by showing that gendered disinformation can also be mobilized against women's rights agendas and against measures designed to combat violence, meaning that democratic harm appears both in the exclusion of women actors and in the distortion of policy debate itself. Fuchs and Schäfer (2020) add that the normalization of misogynistic abuse shifts the normative boundaries of acceptable public speech and contributes to polarization. The cumulative implication across the corpus is that these attacks degrade representative democracy by narrowing who can speak safely, who is heard as legitimate, and which claims can circulate without gendered delegitimation (Harmer and Southern, 2021; Every-Palmer et al., 2024; Riedl et al., 2025; Tzvetkova, 2024; Fuchs and Schäfer, 2020).

Institutional responses in this seven-study evidence base are present, but they are typically assessed as fragmented, underpowered, and more reactive than preventive. The most sustained attention is directed toward digital platforms, parliaments, regulators, and law enforcement or interagency security actors, while political parties and electoral bodies are notably underdeveloped in the corpus. Tzvetkova (2024) points to regulatory and policy efforts such as the Digital Services Act, fact-checking infrastructures, and public awareness initiatives, but also underscores how gendered attacks can themselves destabilize institutional responses, as illustrated by the rapid suspension of the U.S. Disinformation Governance Board after the sexualized targeting of its head. Riedl et al. (2025) are more critical still, arguing that platform responses are experienced as unreliable, slow, and heavily dependent on victim labour, with reporting and blocking tools offering limited reassurance and self-regulation proving insufficient. Every-Palmer et al. (2024) document parliamentary and interagency responses, including specialist threat assessment, security support, training, and collaboration between police, mental health professionals, and parliamentary services, yet they also emphasize that support remains inadequate and that progress with technology companies has been slow. Koukopoulos et al. (2025) help explain why institutional responses remain uneven by showing

that the field itself is conceptually fragmented and lacks shared measurement tools, which inhibits coordinated action across research, practice, and policy. Overall, the literature evaluates current responses as only partially substantive. They are often symbolic in visibility, reactive in timing, and inconsistent in protection, with limited capacity, weak enforcement, fragmented responsibility, and uneven commitment across governance actors worsening the political consequences for women in politics rather than containing them (Tzvetkova, 2024; Riedl et al., 2025; Every-Palmer et al., 2024; Koukopoulos et al., 2025).

### *D. Comparative Synthesis, Research Gaps, and Future Directions*

Taken together, the seven reviewed studies converge on a central finding: gendered disinformation and technology-facilitated abuse are not treated as incidental by-products of online politics, but as patterned mechanisms that constrain women's democratic presence by targeting legitimacy, safety, and public authority. Across highly different settings, including the UK, Japan, Italy, New Zealand, Lebanon, broader European disinformation contexts, and a global Delphi exercise, the literature repeatedly shows that attacks on women in politics are structured through stereotype reproduction, reputational degradation, intimidation, and communicative hostility. Whether expressed through false or misleading narratives, microaggressions, misogynistic abuse, sexualized threats, doxxing, or coordinated harassment, the recurrent outcome is to make women's participation more precarious and more costly. At the same time, the studies differ in important ways. Some foreground gendered disinformation as a content problem rooted in falsity, malign intent, and stereotype activation, while others frame the issue through psychological violence, semiotic violence, or technology-facilitated abuse more broadly. Likewise, outcomes vary in emphasis, with some studies focusing on delegitimation and stereotype reinforcement, while others prioritize fear, emotional exhaustion, self-censorship, withdrawal, or institutional neglect. What is discussed most consistently is online harassment, sexist stereotyping, and silencing. What remains less developed is sustained empirical attention to cross-platform dynamics, private messaging infrastructures, and visual or synthetic manipulations such as image-based abuse and deepfakes, which are acknowledged in the corpus but only thinly examined as primary objects of study (Tzvetkova, 2024; Harmer and Southern, 2021; Koukopoulos et al., 2025; Riedl et al., 2025; Fuchs and Schäfer, 2020; Sportelli and D'Errico, 2025; Every-Palmer et al., 2024).

The most visible research gaps across the seven studies concern conceptual fragmentation, weak comparability, limited causal leverage, and thin evaluation of institutional effectiveness. Koukopoulos et al. (2025) make this explicit by showing that the field operates across linguistic, conceptual, and disciplinary silos, with contested terminology, uncertainty over gendered descriptors, and weak familiarity with measurement tools. That diagnosis helps explain why cross-study comparison remains difficult in the rest of the corpus. The reviewed studies use different units of analysis, including disinformation cases, abusive tweets, Delphi expert judgments, interview narratives, and parliamentary survey responses, and they focus on distinct settings ranging from open social media to encrypted messaging apps. This diversity

is valuable, but it also means that the literature still lacks a stable comparative vocabulary and robust shared indicators. Moreover, although the reviewed studies are strong at identifying mechanisms and harms, they provide limited causal evidence in a stricter sense. Most show plausible links between digital attacks and political effects, but few can isolate direction, magnitude, or variation across institutional contexts with high precision. A similar limitation appears in the treatment of institutional responses. Platforms, parliamentary services, media literacy efforts, security coordination, and regulatory initiatives are all mentioned, but the evidence base remains much better at diagnosing failure than at systematically evaluating what works. The literature therefore suggests that institutional responses are often fragmented, reactive, and insufficient, yet it rarely provides comparative or longitudinal assessment of their effectiveness (Koukopoulos et al., 2025; Harmer and Southern, 2021; Riedl et al., 2025; Every-Palmer et al., 2024; Sportelli and D'Errico, 2025).

Against this background, the contribution of the present literature review lies in bringing together four strands that are often treated separately in the reviewed scholarship: forms of attack, causal mechanisms, political effects, and institutional responses. Read in isolation, the seven studies might appear to address adjacent but fragmented problems, such as misinformation, online abuse, parliamentary harassment, platform governance, or conceptual debates in the technology-facilitated abuse field. Read comparatively, however, they reveal a more coherent analytical sequence. Different forms of digital attack, from stereotype-laden disinformation to persistent harassment and doxxing, operate through recurrent mechanisms such as delegitimation, intimidation, cumulative psychological burden, and infrastructural neglect. These mechanisms then translate into political effects that include reduced participation, constrained strategic communication, damaged visibility, self-censorship, and weakened representative equality. Institutional responses enter this chain not as a separate afterthought, but as a mediating condition that can either interrupt or intensify harm. In the reviewed evidence, they more often intensify it through delay, fragmentation, under-enforcement, or an overreliance on victim self-management. This review therefore helps reframe gendered digital attacks not as disconnected phenomena, but as part of an integrated political process through which women's representation is contested in digital environments (Tzvetkova, 2024; Harmer and Southern, 2021; Riedl et al., 2025; Fuchs and Schäfer, 2020; Every-Palmer et al., 2024).

Future research should build on this integrated framework in four directions. First, comparative cross-country research is needed to move beyond nationally bounded accounts and to test how political systems, media environments, and platform use shape variation in forms of attack and institutional response. Second, the field needs more systematic evaluation of interventions by platforms, parliaments, regulators, security actors, and related institutions, especially research that can distinguish symbolic commitment from substantive protection. Third, more focused empirical work is needed on deepfake, cheapfake, and image-based abuse. These are clearly recognized in the reviewed corpus as politically significant, yet remain underdeveloped relative to text-based abuse and stereotype-driven disinformation. Fourth,

stronger integration is needed between research on women's political representation and research on digital violence. Several of the reviewed studies already imply this connection, but future work should theorize it more directly and examine how digitally mediated abuse affects candidacy pipelines, representative practice, and democratic inclusion over time. Pursuing these directions would help move the field from descriptive recognition of harm toward a more cumulative and policy-relevant understanding of how gendered digital attacks reshape democratic representation (Harmer and Southern, 2021; Koukopoulos et al., 2025; Riedl et al., 2025; Sportelli and D'Errico, 2025; Every-Palmer et al., 2024).

## Conclusion

This review demonstrates that gendered disinformation and technology-facilitated abuse should be understood not as isolated incidents of online hostility, but as patterned mechanisms of political exclusion directed at women in politics. Across the seven reviewed studies, the most consistent finding is that attacks such as stereotype-laden disinformation, misogynistic harassment, sexualized abuse, doxxing, and coordinated digital intimidation undermine women's legitimacy, increase the burdens of public visibility, and make participation more precarious and costly. These harms extend beyond individual distress. They affect candidacy, strategic communication, representative practice, and the broader quality of democratic inclusion by narrowing who can speak safely and be recognised as a legitimate political actor.

The main contribution of this study lies in integrating four strands that are often treated separately in the literature: forms of attack, causal mechanisms, political effects, and institutional responses. This synthesis shows that institutional responses remain fragmented, reactive, and unevenly effective, while the literature itself is still marked by definitional fragmentation, weak cross-study comparability, limited causal evidence, and thin evaluation of interventions. Future research therefore needs to develop stronger comparative designs, examine institutional effectiveness more systematically, and give greater empirical attention to underexplored forms of abuse such as deepfakes and image-based manipulation. A more integrated research agenda is essential if scholarship is to move from documenting harm toward explaining and mitigating the democratic consequences of digital violence against women in politics.

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