# Analyzing Gender as a Concomitant of Political Violence: A Review of *Positioning Women in Conflict Studies* by Sabrina Karim and Daniel W. Hill, Jr.

## Siyasi Şiddetin Bir Bileşeni Olarak Toplumsal Cinsiyeti Analiz Etmek: Sabrina Karim ve Daniel W. Hill, Jr.'ın *Çatışma Çalışmalarında Kadınların Konumlandırılması: Kadınların Statüsünün Siyasi Şiddete Etkisi* Adlı Eserinin Değerlendirilmesi

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## Abstract

This book, by authors Sabrina Karim and Daniel W. Hill, Jr. takes a critical look at the role played by women in political violence, examining the ways in which treatment of women can both reduce and exacerbate such problems. Regarding the concept of 'gender equality' as overly broad and prone to conflating disparate issues, they instead focus on the concept of 'women's status' looking specifically at four key components: women's inclusion, women's rights, harm to women, and societal beliefs about women's roles. For each of these, the authors develop measurements which allow them to assess their impact on four forms of political violence: inter-state conflict, intra-state conflict, state repression, and terrorism. Their findings suggest that the relationship is not uniform, and that each aspect of women's status has a distinct and individual impact on these different forms of violence.

**Keywords:** Political violence, Terrorism, Gender roles, Women's rights, Gender norms, Conflict.

## Öz

Sabrina Karim ve Daniel W. Hill Jr. tarafından kaleme alınan bu kitap, toplumsal cinsiyetin ve kadınların statüsünün dünya genelinde siyasal şiddet üzerindeki etkisini anlamayı amaçlayarak bu tür sorunların azalıp artmasına sebep olan kadınlara yönelik tutumları ele alıyor. 'Cinsiyet eşitliği' kavramını fazla geniş kapsamlı ve bambaşka konuları tek bir noktada birleştirmeye meyilli bulduklarından, yazarlar, bunun yerine 'kadınların statüsü' kavramına odaklanarak, özellikle dört ana bileşen üzerinde durmuşlardır: kadınların katılımı, kadın hakları, kadınlara verilen zarar ve kadınların rollerine dair toplumsal inançlar. Bu ana bileşenlerin devletlerarası çatışma, devlet-içi çatışma, devlet baskısı ve terörizm şeklinde adlandırılan dört tür siyasal şiddet üzerindeki etkilerini değerlendirmeye imkân tanıyacak şekilde, her biri için ölçüler geliştirmişlerdir. Ulaştıkları sonuçlar, ilişkinin tek tip olmadığı ve kadınların statüsünün her bir cephesinin bu farklı şiddet biçimleri üzerinde belirgin ve bireysel bir etkisi olduğu iddiasını ortaya koymuştur.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Siyasal şiddet, Terörizm, Cinsiyet rolleri, Kadın hakları, Cinsiyet normları, Çatışma.

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In the field of conflict studies, there are numerous works that look at how violence affects women. Often such works examine the issue of sexual violence in wartime, using both historical analyses, as in Heineman's (2013) 'Sexual Violence in Conflict Zones', or more contemporary survivor testimony, as we find in Lamb's (2020) 'Our Bodies, Their Battlefields'. In contrast, this book, by authors Sabrina Karim and Daniel W. Hill, Jr., belongs to what is possibly a smaller group of works, such as Goldstein's (2001) 'War and Gender' and Sjoberg's (2014) 'Gender, War, and Conflict', which looks at the impact that women, and gender, have in shaping conflict.

The purpose of the book is outlined in its opening pages when the authors state how "a global decline in women's status could be followed by more frequent civil conflict, terrorism, interstate war, and/or repression" (p. 2). Their aim is to develop a greater understanding of these issues and determine whether there is, in fact, a measurable relationship between the status of women in society and the prevalence of various forms of conflict. The authors do not, however, follow the path we might expect from a work that is clearly grounded in feminist theory. They take exception to the use of 'gender inequality' as a term used to quantify problems faced by women, viewing it as overly broad and conflating too many disparate areas which can prevent precise examination of each individually distinct issue. They also question the ultimate efficacy of addressing these imbalances, suggesting that "gender equality is used as a technocratic term for including women without really discussing how gender shapes the experiences of both men and women within institutions" (p. 7).

This book takes a different tack and instead chooses to differentiate 'status' from 'equality', recognizing four core aspects of the former: women's inclusion, women's rights, harm to women, and beliefs about women's gender roles. They then "delineate each concept by giving it an explicit definition, creating a measure for it, and describing the theoretical connections identified in the literature between the concept and the forms of political violence explored" (p. 8).

This is very much a book of "theory" and "concept"; the latter term appears more than four hundred times throughout the book, though not to its detriment. It is a book which explores novel ideas about the nature

of gender as a causal factor in violence, but it backs up these epistemic considerations with substantial Bayesian modeling and extensive appendices that examine in more detail that data used in the main text. The focus is quite wide, rather than taking a granular look at specific cases, the book takes a macro approach, laying out theoretical scaffolding that supports pathways for new analysis.

This analysis takes place after two introductory chapters which respectively explore the conceptual basis for using their quadripartite theory of 'women's status', and the methodology they employ for measuring the impact of gender in each of the four forms of conflict. During this and later sections of the book there are repeated references to several authors whose recurrence suggest a strong inlfuence on the development of the books ideas, notably the works of Laura Sjoberg, Mala Htun and S. Laura Weldon, and Valerie Hudson. The latter's work with Bowen and Lynne Nielson (2020) in 'The First Political Order' seems to have been particularly influential.

The meat of the book is to be found in chapters three to six, with the first of these focusing on the topic of women's inclusion. The authors discover some interesting patterns in their data, for example that representation in the executive and legislative branches corelate, yet neither of these fields share a similar connection to the judiciary, which instead has strong connections to representation in public spaces. Possibly, suggesting that the former pair share similar career paths, while the judiciary is more closely linked to women's advancement through the bureaucracy (p. 89). The main element of this chapter is exploring the idea that women's inclusion will create more peaceful outcomes, primarily through increased diversity of perspectives and opinions. Their data, however, finds that "though men have a consistently more favorable view of the use of force in foreign policy, the size of this difference varies from year to year, country to country, region to region, and even moment to moment" (p. 94). In others words they find little quantitative support for the idea that greater representation of women will reduce violence per se, rather, it appears that there is a measurable impact on some forms of violence but not always positive; the level of terrorism sees a decrease, but intrastate violence sees an increase (p. 114). Regarding the latter, they surmise that this might be due to push back from men who feel that

women encroaching on previously male-dominated spaces, requires them to express their aggression in other areas. A recent study by Piazza (2025) offers some support for this, where a survey of American males found that those who held 'incel' beliefs were 124% more supportive of political violence.

In Chapter 4 the book moves on to the topic of women's rights, where one of the common arguments regarding violence reduction is that states "that adopt women's rights often do so to show they are committed to liberal norms, including the rule of law and non-violent settlement of disputes" (p. 121). As such, these states might be expected to exhibit lower levels of violence, yet, while there is a clear link between women's rights and liberal democracy, the existence of a clear link between liberal democracy and nonviolence is less clear. 'Democratic Peace Theory' has been found to have considerable flaws (Gürsözlü, 2018) and it is udnerstandable that the authors also find that, while strong women's rights typically indicate strong human rights more boradly, and thus a lower level of state repression, there is no strong signals for a link between women's rights and violence reduction.

Chapter 5 examines the harm experienced by women, specifically, whether the existence of higher patterns of harm against women in society, for example, via domestic violence, relates to higher levels of political violence. Phrased another way, the argument is whether "structural violence against women serves as an indicator about how much value states place on human life" (p. 155). Some of the arguments that suggest a link is possible are that people who experience familial violence are more likely to engage in violence as adults, while, in contrast, members of homes that are free of violence are more likely to use peaceful conflict resolution and place a higher value on the wellbeing of people outside their own identity group. The authors find some support for these views and claim that their data shows that "societies that harm women tend to experience more interstate and civil conflict" (p. 172). However, this conclusion is less convincing than previous findings. Not that it is necessarily wrong, but rather that there could be more done to make a stronger argument. For example, there is already a strong correlation between conflict and domestic violence, with much of the data suggesting that it is not that the latter which causes the former but instead the opposite. Numerous studies

have shown that following conflict, domestic violence often sees a spike stemming from trauma and instability suffered by returning veterans, for example in Nigeria (Ekhator-Mobayode, 2022), Colombia (Svallfors, 2023), and the United Kingdom (Lane, 2022). One, likely unavoidable, weakness of the book is that even with its reduced focus from the thirty-plus elements that are at times included under the far wider concept of 'gender inequality', it is still taking a broad view of several large fields that does not allow sufficient space to consider all the possible variables.

The final area of study, the impact of beliefs about gender roles, is examined in chapter six. The authors spend a large part of this section considering the possible link between attitudes to gender and political ideologies that might lead to armed conflict (p. 189), ultimately finding that there is evidence for some connection between rigid gender beliefs and state repression, and a negative connection between women's political inclusion and incidence rates of terrorism. They find little evidence of a relationship between beliefs about women and civil conflict or interstate war (p. 191). This is another area where other relevant variables may have been left unexplored. There is some evidence that levels of gender equality have a limiting effect on the degree of gender violence committed by armed forces (Gaurnieri & Tur-Pats, 2023). However, there is also evidence suggesting that in cases where asymmetric use of sexual violence is employed in a conflict, i.e. where it is overwhelmingly one side that engages in sexual attacks on women, in the vast majority it is state forces that employ sexual violence (Wood & Bleckner, 2017). Possible reasons for this include the material asymmetry between the forces involved, with non-state actors accepting troops of both genders, not from any sense of equality, but out of necessity. Another is a higher need for non-state groups to retain the goodwill and support of local populations for shelter, supply, and intelligence, possibly leading to stricter prohibitions against sexual violence by their leadership. Again, while it would have been nice to see more examination of all potentially relevant factors, it cannot be held against the book that it is not so utterly comprehensive, as only so much can be covered in a single volume.

The book concludes with policy recommendations based on its findings that greater inclusion of women and more flexible and inclusive beliefs can have a negative impact on terror, that stronger women's rights can reduce state repression, and that higher levels of harm can lead to greater

levels of civil and interstate conflict. It also offers suggestions of areas for further study, and it provides extensive appendices offering more detail on the data used. Overall, the book provides a fantastic framework for the study of the links between social treatment of women and patterns of state violence, and it does a commendable job in focusing on key areas of specific relevance that might have been obscured had the broader and less clearly delineated 'gender inequality' been used as a basis. With that said, it does leave some areas unexplored; the questions regarding domestic violence and use of sexual violence by asymmetric forces are examples. Another that would have been topical, given recent events in Ukraine and Gaza, is the question of sexual violence as an element of propaganda in conflict, and whether it is more incidence, or effectiveness, is affected by the status of women in societies were it is employed. Yet, these unexplored pathways also highlight the core strength of the book. Its even-handed and quantitively grounded examination of its different subject areas provide a valuable framework for how such topics can be assessed through the connection of theory and hard data. In doing so, it provides both a platform for future study of related but under-analyzed areas, and a guide for how to do so in an engaging and efficient manner.

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