TOXICITY AGAINST BRAZILIAN WOMEN DEPUTIES ON TWITTER: A CATEGORIZATION OF DISCURSIVE VIOLENCE

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Introduction
The obstacles that women face in the political arena are a frequent theme in the literature and, in general, seem to be similar in many countries. Several works discuss the difficulties of competing for space in an environment that is traditionally masculine appear both from an institutional (Araújo & Alves, 2007; Sporh et al., 2016) and a social (Beard, 2018) point of view. Social media platforms, however, have added more challenges to this reality. Through these platforms, women have been strongly attacked, with deeper effects both on their political and daily life (Ferreira, Rodriguez, & Cunha, 2021). Thus, these platforms can effectively decrease women's representation as they increase gender violence (Paz, Montero-Díaz, & Moreno-Delgado, 2020; Silva, Francisco, & Sampaio, 2021) and increase the trend of growing global political violence against women (Krook, 2018).

In this context, we argue that different types of discursive violence may create different types of toxic discourses about female deputies on social media. We want to explore, in this paper, how discourse in online social media platforms create toxic environments for women in politics and if there are differences in the toxicity for different political spectrum/ideology. To discuss these questions, we focus on a case study on Brazilian female deputies and Twitter, with a dataset of 1400 violent tweets, with over 2500 retweets.

Theoretical Approach
Discursive violence is a concept that has been explored by many authors. Discourse is a source of symbolic power being part of the process of domination and naturalizing power relations (Bourdieu, 1999), including gender violence. Thus, the discourse is also constitutive of the existing power relations in our society, allowing other forms of violence to emerge (Zizek, 2008). Thus, while this type of violence comes from

language, it is this system of values legitimated by language that allows violence to be justified.

Discursive violence assumes many facets, such as hate speech or incivility both in national (Sponholz, 2020; Rizzotto & Saraiva, 2020; Silva, Francisco, & Sampaio, 2021) and international literature (Calvert, 1997; Anderson & Huntington, 2017; Omilusi, 2017; Rossini, 2019; Paz, Montero-Díaz, & Moreno-Delgado, 2020; Brison, 2021; Castaño-Pulgarín et al, 2021). In these works, the focus is mostly on how discourse constitutes violence, rather than how it can be toxic. Toxicity is a concept less discussed in the literature. It is a concept that comes from the debate on environmental issues (Buell, 2003). However, toxicity is also connected to the emergence of unsafe environments that legitimate violence (Wexler, 2013).

In this paper, we understand toxicity because of the spread and legitimation of violent discourse. This is an essential dimension of social media platforms' action and discourse. Furthermore, the repetition of this toxic violence is capable of silencing and pushing these women away from their political space. Toxicity may also have a connection with the political spectrum. Some works, for example, connect political violence with extremist rhetoric (Pickard et al., 2022). Twitter may allow toxicity as these violent discourses are easily reproduced and the codes used for violence may challenge moderation tools. The number of retweets, for example, may show how toxic is a certain discourse.

Methods

We used Social Feed Manager (Prom, 2006) to access Twitter's API to collect data. We focused on tweets mentioning the official accounts of female Brazilian federal deputies from the term of 2019/2022. From a total of 77 deputies, there were 64 official accounts. The data was collected during two months, May and June of 2022, totaling more than 500 thousand tweets. To analyze these tweets, we employed a mixed-methods approach. We first employed computational analysis to examine the total occurrence of lexicons that could be associated with violent discourses. This approach follows the steps of Corpus Linguistics (Sinclair, 1992). Tweets are then filtered to create a dataset of violent discourses, with 1477 original tweets and 2533 retweets. Our approach to this final dataset was to qualitatively analyze themes that emerge from these concepts and sort them into categories of violence based on their effects (discourse analysis). These categories were further connected to how they spread, or how they are connected to toxicity. Finally, we also grouped the tweets based on the political ideology of the deputies (based on Bolognesi, Ribeiro & Codato, 2020) to understand if this could be a predictor of toxicity. In all, accounts were distributed as follows: Right-wing, 35 accounts, center, 7 accounts, and left-wing, 22 accounts.

Results

First of all, we found that political polarization may be an important issue connected to violence. Deputies from the center were never cited and thus, we disregarded these categories from the analysis. All violent tweets cited only female deputies from the right and the left. We thus focused on them.

In general, we found six major categories where concepts from tweets could be classified in. The first one was "moral behavior". This category had tweets that criticize deputies based on how condonable their morality was. A second category was "cognitive ability", as women were also frequently criticized based on how "dumb" they were. Body shaming was another frequent emergent category, as many of these women were referred to through derogatory nicknames, such as "Peppa pig", "old" or even "girl" to diminish their credibility. Female deputies were also criticized for their political views, which tend to be more common also among men. Finally, women were also compared to objects and received attacks that claimed they were submissive to their male colleagues. Tables 2 and 3 show how violent tweets for each side of the spectrum were classified in the dataset.

Table 3 – Left-wing deputies

Type	Moral	Cognitive ability	Body shaming	Political views	Submission to male colleagues	Comparison to objects
Associated concepts (Examples)	lover disgusting thug scoundrel criminal negligible hypocritical envious liar ridiculous tramp shame	crazy dumb insane joke	girl woman little nose madam	Communist Leftist Esquerdista enemy petralha	scoundrel sucker	Plague shit
Total retweets	590	225	118	204	360	85

Table 2 – Right-wing deputies

Type	Moral behavior	Cognitive ability	Body shaming	Political views	Submission to male colleagues	Comparison to objects
Associated concepts (Examples)	opportunist immoral naughty false asshole criminal thug liar shame envious swindler	crazy sick dumb stupid asshole	Peppa Pig Old lady	Direitalha Militant	fetish kiss-ass sucker	Shit Cancer
Total retweets	470	137	126	46	88	53

These results suggest that all female deputies suffered the same types of violence, although to different degrees. Deputies from the left wing, while less in number, received the majority of attacks. The most widespread violent category was moral judgment for both right-wing and left-wing deputies (1060 retweets total). The second category was cognitive ability (362). Body shaming was the third category for the right-wing (126) and the fourth for the left-wing (118). The third category with the most violent discourses for leftists was name-calling based on ideological views (204) Categories connected to comparison to objects and submission to male colleagues were less frequent (Left=85 and Right = 53).

This data suggests that toxic discourse (Wexler, 2013) against female deputies on Twitter is largely based on violence connected to women's behavior and abilities in the political realm, rather than ideology or propositions. This means women are criticized for being women, rather than, because of their work. Twitter, thus, tends to reproduce the types of violence that women suffer in other realms (Paz, Montero-Díaz, & Moreno-Delgado, 2020; Silva, Francisco, & Sampaio, 2021). These ways of describing and depreciating women associate female behavior with elements already observed in the literature and disqualify women deputies in front of their male colleagues. Finally, ideological affiliation, while may influence the amount of toxicity created (deputies from the left wing received more toxicity than deputies from the right), they don't influence the toxicity of the discourse about who these women are and how they are perceived by the audiences.

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