

Political campaigns may influence acceptance of violence against women

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During the 2016 Presidential Election, both major party candidates, Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump, ran on polarizing platforms focusing on a few central issues: immigration, medicare, social issues (i.e., abortion, paid family leave), international trade, and sexism and violence against women.

The first major party nomination for a woman was triumphant, but much like the 2008 Election highlighted racism within the U.S., the 2016 [election](#) highlighted the role of sexism in the U.S. as both Clinton and Trump were subject to criticism from their own parties and their opposing parties regarding their personal histories of violence against women, making it a cornerstone of the [presidential election](#).

Nicole Johnson, assistant professor of counseling psychology at Lehigh University, set out to examine the influence, both positive and negative, of presidential campaigns, voting behavior, and candidate selection, on social views of rape culture.

She found in her latest research that political campaigns may in fact influence the acceptance of violence against women.

In the new study led by Johnson, titled: "Rape Culture and Candidate Selection in the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election," (10.1093/sp/jxz021) published this week in the *Journal of Social Politics*, she and her colleagues collected and studied data from two samples of college students at the same university, pre- and post- the 2016 U.S. Presidential

Election in order to determine the effect of political campaigns on how participants viewed the acceptance of violence against women.

Results of the study showed an increase in how participants viewed the acceptance of violence and a decrease in how they viewed the acceptance of traditional feminine gender roles in the post election sample compared to the pre-election sample.

"This means that following the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election participants perceived their peers as more accepting of violence, including violence against women, and less accepting of traditional feminine gender roles. We hypothesized that this may have been due to strong statements endorsing violence during the [campaign](#), as well as the demonstration of a woman (Hillary Clinton) being successful in a perceived male sphere (i.e., Politics)."

Supporters of Democratic candidates—Clinton and Sanders—perceived less overall acceptance of rape culture compared to Trump supporters with specific differences on hostile sexism, hostility toward women, and acceptance of violence. Thus, Johnson says, "Trump supporters perceived their peers as being more accepting of attitudes contributing to violence against women, which has demonstrated predictive power of personal attitudes and actions."

"We expected to find an overall increase in perceived acceptance of rape culture from the pre- to post-election samples, however, the decrease in traditional feminine gender roles, potentially due to the first female major party candidate, may have dampened the overall effect," Johnson said.

She says this research is important because it highlights the potential influence of political campaigns on the acceptance of violence against women and in turn, a critical area for intervention and the creation of

public policy.

"Policy makers would benefit from this information in order to inform the creation of policy surrounding political campaigns, particularly those involving [women](#) candidates."

She and her co-authors hope these findings will highlight the potential impact of [political campaigns](#) and candidate selection on acceptance of [violence](#) and prejudice and in turn will inform the development of public policy to increase fairness and safety within politics and culture.

More information: Nicole L Johnson et al, Rape Culture and Candidate Selection in the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election, *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society* (2019). [DOI: 10.1093/sp/jxz021](#)

Provided by Lehigh University

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