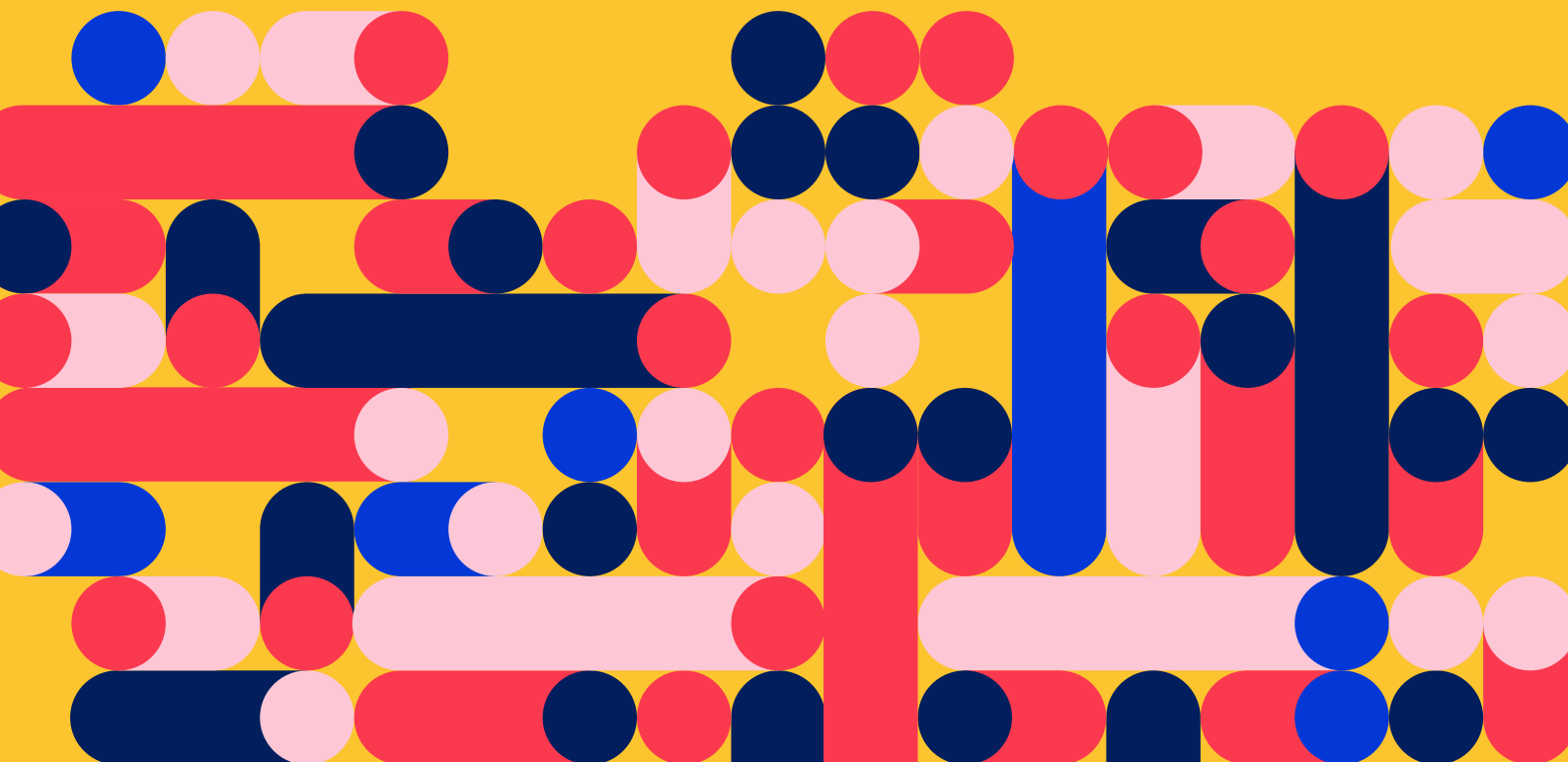


Gender-based political violence on the Internet

Policy Paper Latin America and the Caribbean

AlSur



AlSur is a consortium of organizations working in civil society and academia in Latin America that seek to strengthen human rights in the region's digital environment by working together. For more information about Al Sur and its members, visit <https://www.alsur.lat>.

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Introduction and presentation

Gender-based violence occurs in different areas of daily life, and that is especially true in Latin America, where various regional indicators¹ expose the ongoing gender inequalities, reflected in economic disparities as much as in the disproportion regarding access to education, health care and even the Internet². Along with this, the serious security problems existing in the region and the lack of access to justice reveal an asymmetry in the protection of rights, especially when it comes to women and black, indigenous or LGBT+ people.

In the political sphere, when women or groups historically excluded from power, against all odds, become heads of the executive, are elected to legislative seats, or even occupy positions of authority and participation in the judiciary, their voices and those of the social movements of which they are part are amplified, shaking spaces of power thought by and for white men of the economic elite. However, we note with concern how the gradual increase in diversity and plurality in representative bodies has led to greater violence as a counterpart, a trend that has been indicated by regional studies (Biroli, 2018; Krook and Sanín, 2016; Archenti and ALBAINE, 2013) that show an increase in reports of cases of gender-based political violence.

Moreover, Internet platforms are increasingly becoming part of that perverse equation. Gender-based violence on the Internet has been the subject of several studies, including a report by the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women³ and other relevant civil society initiatives aimed at raising awareness and protecting women and non-binary people on the Internet, with projects such as Take Back The Tech!, AcosoOnline, Ciberseguras, Luchadoras, Safermanas, and the emergence of feminist networks such as the Rede Transfeminista de Cuidados Digitais or the Rede Feminista de Juristas (deFEMde), among many others⁴. In addition, recently, organizations that deal with human rights on the Internet (including some that are part of AL SUR), have published studies that focus more specifically on analyzing gender-based violence when it is manifested as gender-based political violence on the Internet, among others in Mexico (Luchadoras, 2018), Panama (IPANDETEC, 2019, 2020), Peru (Hiperderecho, 2018) and Brazil (for example, the tretaqui.org platform that accompanied the 2018 and 2020 elections, and Monitora, 2020). Taking these initiatives as a starting point, this paper aims to expand those efforts, providing a regional perspective on gender-based political violence that is also carried out through the Internet, and providing recommendations to the electoral justice system, online platforms, candidates, political parties and civil society, in order to combat with due attention this trend that endangers the achievement of a more diverse and plural political system.

1 [Global Gender Gap Report 2020](#), World Economic Forum (WEF), Geneva, Switzerland, 2020.

2 *Desigualdad digital de género en América Latina y el Caribe (Gender-based digital inequality in Latin America and the Caribbean)*, Instituto Interamericano de Cooperación para la Agricultura (IICA), University of Oxford, Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), Costa Rica, 2020.

3 Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences on online violence against women and girls from a human rights perspective, UNHRC, 2018; [Recommendations on technology-related Violence Against Women \(VAW\) for the UN](#), Coding Rights, Al Sur, 2018; Organizações lançam relatório sobre violência de gênero na Internet, que será subsídio para discussões na ONU, recommendations collected by Coding Rights and InternetLab in consultation with Brazilian civil society, 2017.

4 Iniciativas ciberfeministas latinoamericanas (Latin American cyberfeminist initiatives) infographic, Tedic, 2018.

Regional trends

From a regional perspective, the right to vote came as a result of the abolitionist struggles and the feminist-suffrage movement, which made the female vote possible for the first time in Latin America in 1927, in Uruguay, with the first woman to hold office being Alzira Soriano, elected as a mayor in Brazil in 1928. Certainly, the historical struggles of social movements in Latin America set the tone for the next steps in the democratic struggle for social participation, which currently presents a new challenge: the pursuit of a reality in which, beyond being able to vote, our vote is taken seriously, and in which the people for whom we vote are not at risk for having been elected.

In Latin America, the participation in politics is being increasingly diversified, ranking above the global average in the index of representation of women in institutional politics, with 31.1 % of the seats in the region's parliaments held by women against a world average of 24.9 %. Data from the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) corroborate this representative advancement⁵, noting that the global proportion of female legislators continues to increase, albeit slowly, when the current percentage is compared with the 18.3 % in 2008 and 11.3 % in 1995. However, there is still a very large disparity within the region in terms of female participation in parliaments, from Cuba with 53.2 % to Haiti with only 2.5 %. Although the trends are encouraging, the region shows some of the worst indicators in the world regarding gender-based violence, being the most dangerous place for women (with the exception of areas currently at war)⁶, which means that occupying spaces of political power becomes a risk and a threat to women and LGBT+ people.

Gender-based political violence

Feminist studies used to understand gender within the binary framework of men and women. In the late 80s and early 90s, studies carried out in Latin America by authors such as Lélia Gonzales (1982), in dialogue with other productions carried out in the United States by black theorists such as bell hooks (1981) and Patricia Hill Collins (1982), raised the need to decrystallize the understanding of what it means to be a woman. In this way, it was possible to bring to this field a more complex examination of what is understood as the collective subject "women". This complexity opened up in turn the possibility of establishing a dialogue on the multiple realities surrounding the experiences of black, peripheral, indigenous and LGBT+ women.

In this paper, we deal with gender-based political violence from this broader framework of diversity, and therefore, the term encompasses any violence committed for gender reasons, perceived specifically in relation to political rights, aimed at influencing the electoral process that begins with the period of political pre-campaigns and continues throughout the exercise of mandates, threatening the maintenance of power.

5 Source: "Women in politics: 2020" map, global ranking for women in executive, government, and parliamentary positions as of 1 January 2020, Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and UN Women, 2020.

6 Source: Facts and figures: Ending violence against women, UN Women, 2018, updated November 2020; as quoted on [América Latina é a região mais letal para as mulheres](#) (Latin America is the most lethal region for women), El País, November 27, 2018. Retrieved November 30, 2020.

It is from this framework that we understand political violence as a manifestation of gender-based violence, analyzed here when it is exercised through the Internet. We also highlight the analytical importance of adopting an intersectional perspective (Gonzales, 1982; Crenshaw, 2002; Carla Akotirene, 2018), to face this problem in its dynamics and structural aspects, so as to understand how the different axes of oppression and subordination, such as class, ethnicity, race or sexuality, are related. This type of violence covers all the aggressive manifestations that seek to undermine the citizen rights and the voices of female candidates and elected women, from mean comments to threats to physical violence, which target mainly women and LGBT+ people, resulting many times in them being forced to withdraw from politics.

Regional narratives on cases of gender-based political violence on the Internet

Based on interviews conducted in 39 countries in 5 regions, the study Sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments in Europe, prepared by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (UIP, 2018), states that 81.8 % of the women parliamentarians interviewed declared to have experienced some form of psychological violence during their mandate, and **mentioned social media networks as the main channel through which this violence was exercised** (p. 3). Another important study is one called Tweets That Chill: Analyzing Online Violence Against Women In Politics, by the National Democratic Institute (NDI, 2019), carried out in Indonesia, Colombia and Kenya. This study shows that after suffering gender-based political violence online, women tend to reduce, pause or completely stop their presence on social media (p. 23).

There is still no regional study focused on collecting data on gender-based political violence on the Internet. Although this paper is not a quantitative study, in order to fill this gap just a little, we present below some testimonies, product of the contribution of organizations that make up AL SUR in several Latin American countries, as well as UN Women, which has documented testimonies of gender-based political violence (2019a; 2019b), and a report by the NGO Luchadoras. Whether due to its wide circulation or due to the specificities of a particular case, subjective reports are relevant for the analysis and location of the phenomenon in the Latin American context.

It is important to contextualize the problem that gender-based political violence currently represents for democracy in the region and to face the challenge of understanding it in all its aspects, for which it is necessary to first point out:

- a. the Latin American context of being formerly a colonial territory, followed by periods of military dictatorships and the subsequent re-democratization of its countries; as well as
- b. the social transformations and the greater diversity in politics that have occurred in recent decades; and finally
- c. the high regional rates of violence linked to discrimination.

These elements are relevant for analyzes such as the one we undertake here, which seek to understand gender-based political violence as a phenomenon that can be explained regionally, but nonetheless differs from one country to another, especially when it comes to the heterogeneity (or the absence) of legislation seeking to adopt affirmative action policies, such as the implementation of political quotas, and the consequent measures taken to ensure the effectiveness of such legislation.

“I used to think that the path of a woman was valued, for being in a public function as significant as the legislature, but then they tell you these comments and spread them on social media from the government. (...) The psychological damage can be much more serious than the physical damage. To talk about certain issues you no longer feel safe even when talking on the phone”.

– Lourdes Tibán Guala, National Deputy/Assembly member, Ecuador

“In social media, it is way harsher, those are attacks that are loaded with racial insults. I even receive specific death threats, ‘if I find you on the street, I will beat you to death.’ Different concrete violences are added to symbolic violences. It is horrible when there is a viral video of you, saying that you are a defender of bandits. A few days ago, the federal police intercepted information about a murder plan on the darkweb”.

– Talíria Petrone, Federal Deputy, Brazil

“I am an authority and yet they don't see me as an authority. They can't see a woman in a position of authority. (...) The experience in parliament is very macho, very violent”, says the deputy about the sexual harassment she suffered by another deputy and that was recorded during a parliamentary session in the Legislative Assembly of the State of São Paulo.

– Isa Penna, State Representative, Brazil

“I received insults. They mess with one's family, with my children, with my husband, with me; ‘you are the worst of the nation’, coming from some people who use fake profiles on social media to denigrate other people. They even treated me as a thief, or say I'm unfit for office; all due to political disputes”.

– Jenny Nair Gómez, Mayor, Colombia

Appointed Minister of Women, she suffered attacks on WhatsApp groups, on Twitter, and there were online petitions demanding her resignation. She responded to different expressions of support, stating that she was “very happy and very moved by the support and for knowing that I am not alone”.

– Matilda González Gil, former Minister of Women, Colombia

“One day, one of my fellow councilors made a publication on social media, adding my name and surname, stating: ‘We have already discovered this traitor, she is an infiltrator of the opposition party.’ Undoubtedly, this comment went viral (...) From that moment on, an offensive was carried out on several fronts, raising slander both in the regional meetings of the party coalition to which the sector of which I was part belongs, and through social media. It was a way to legitimize that political violence, disqualifying me, generating moral damage against my dignity. (...) Then I received threats from one of the councilors, who sent me a message calling me ‘traitor’, ‘dirty’. I felt as if all doors had been closed to me. The insecurity and loneliness were dominating and frightening me, for which I had to give in and make a decision, because I did not see any possibility of resorting to anyone, either to report this violence or to receive protection. I had to step aside and resign”.

– María Alejandra Rabaza, Councilor of the Local Board of Rivera, Uruguay

“Then, through anonymity, they begin to threaten me, saying “you’ll end up in a black bag ‘bitch’; when you leave your house look sideways, because we’re going to kill you”. There are even accounts dedicated to me as a deputy, and when you read them, you find expressions so harsh... such as cursing my life, my family, wishing me death due to terminal cancer. These types of situations really hit you, because they not only affect one’s dignity, but also one’s family. They even exposed the faces of members of my family, used images of dead relatives”.

– Martha Evelyn Batres, Deputy, El Salvador

“I am a young indigenous, migrant trans woman and I was born and raised in a context that educated us to hate each other and normalize violence. I have suffered discrimination since I first opened my eyes. (...) In the midst of a context as violent as the one that we, trans and indigenous women live in Peru, in the midst of precariousness and with serious economic limitations, we have learned to do politics with our bodies”.

– Gahela Cari Contreras, candidate for Congress, Peru

“It is very shocking what’s going on these days, the things they say to me. I would talk about any given topic, the response remains the same. It is permanent, whatever the subject. (...) They insult so as to weaken me but, above all, so that no one else is encouraged. They are afraid because we have a transforming potential”.

– Ofelia Fernández, youngest Deputy in Latin America, Argentina

“Comments about age, about the body, on social media. Very few in person, I don’t remember any. The usual insults against women: ‘you’re old, fat, wrinkled’. The kind of comments usually made by such macho men. Almost all profiles are fake, but there are also real profiles, both of women and men”.

– Elected Deputy, unidentified, Paraguay

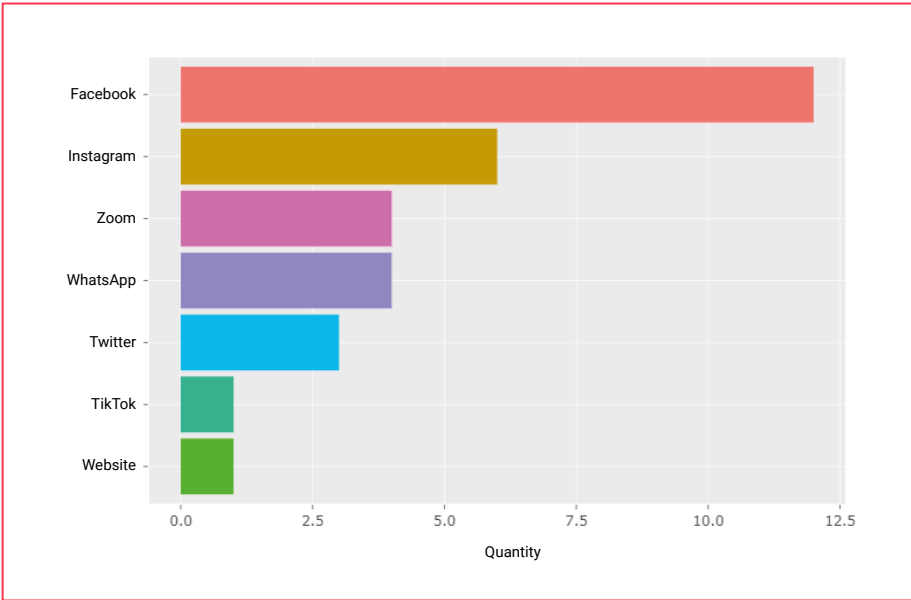
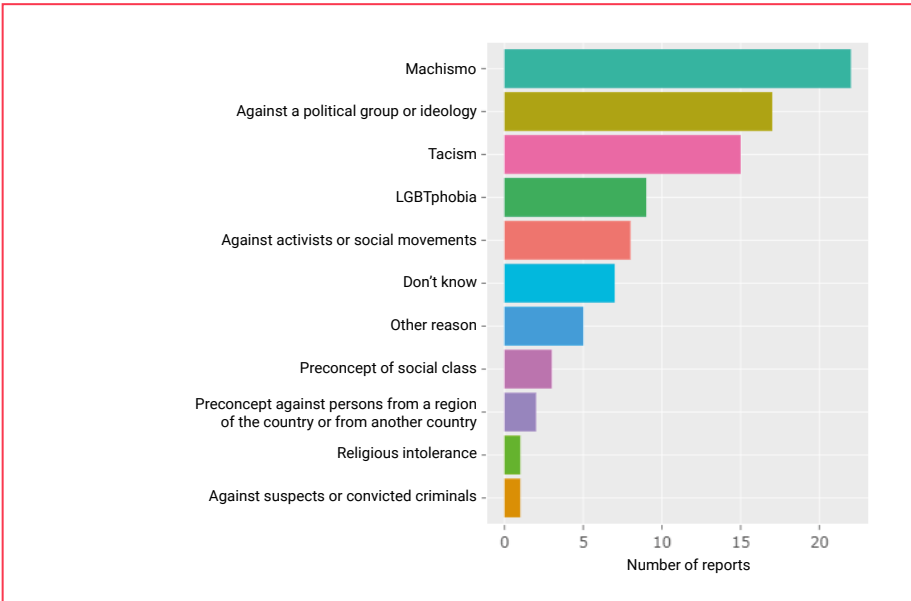
“I do not block people because of their comments, I block them when they mention me in obscene and disrespectful content that threatens my mental health”.

– Anonymous Deputy, Panama. Source: Ipandetec

“Since I received the first attacks through private messages, until the memes or comments on social media, I tried to contact the cyber-police but there were many obstacles”.

– Leidy Guadalupe Castro Gamboa, Mexico. Source: Luchadoras

Beyond testimonies like these, from elected women, online gender-based political violence also occurs throughout electoral campaigns. During the process of the 2020 municipal elections in Brazil, the tretaqui.org platform mapped expressions of online political violence and most of them were linked to gender inequalities. Compiling the complaints received, the following graph indicates how machismo, racism and LGBT-phobia are among the main expressions of political violence registered by the platform. The data shows that Facebook was the platform where there were more cases of violence, with twice as many complaints as Instagram, which came in second place and also belongs to the same company, as well as WhatsApp, which came in third place together with Zoom, where rallies held online were repeatedly invaded in the so-called ‘zombombings’.



Source: datos.tretaqui.org

The use of digital tools has changed the current perception of politics, in aspects such as voting or the ability to influence behavior during campaigns and mandates, thus allowing the increasing consideration of democracy and elections from a digital perspective. Although the Internet can be used as an instrument to amplify the existing voices and social movements, with real possibilities for transformation and for the development of public policies based on a diverse and plural representation of parliamentarians from all segments of the population to achieve what is believed to be real democracy, this can only happen when the exercise of democratic rights and freedoms is strengthened in a continuum between online and offline spaces, where the executive, legislative and judicial branches, the platforms and the solidarity and protection networks of the civil society work together to bring transparency, denouncing and actively combating gender-based political violence on the Internet.

Types of online attacks and their intersectionalities

The following table, prepared for the brochure “Internet and Elections”⁷, represents an attempt to survey different acts of political violence that use the Internet as a medium. This presentation was also inspired by a work carried out together with some Brazilian organizations in order to prepare a report on online gender-based violence addressed to the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women⁸. Understanding the diversity of attacks is the first step to be able to name and identify the problem, to then document, report and seek technical or legal alternatives to prevent or delimit the different types of attacks.

Disinformation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Smear campaigns (intended to discredit the person attacked) ▪ Spreading of false information (often related to sexuality and marriage)
Privacy violations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Exposure of personal data (doxing) ▪ Leaking of personal, private and sexual orientation data, obtained without consent or with consent through a click ▪ Non-consensual disclosure of intimate images (exposure of privacy) ▪ Non-consensual use of materials and photographs ▪ Identity theft
Offenses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Hate speech ▪ Cyberbullying / Insults ▪ Sexual stereotyped exploitation of images ▪ Malicious image and video editing
Threats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sexual and moral harassment ▪ Harassment on social media, with obscene photos and videos ▪ Stalking ▪ Threats of physical violence
Censorship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Massive and coordinated attacks ▪ Algorithm manipulation ▪ Content removal ▪ Blocking of publications, pages or profiles, as response to complaints or at the initiative of social platforms
Invasions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Zoombombing (invasion of video conferences or online events) ▪ Unauthorized access to personal accounts or devices ▪ System invasions / Attacks on system security

Source: “Internet and Elections” brochure, Brazil, 2020

7 Internet e Eleições: Guia para proteção de direitos nas campanhas eleitorais (Internet and Elections: Guide for the protection of rights in political campaigns), Coding Rights and #MeRepresenta for Coalizão Direitos na Rede, Brazil, 2020.

8 Online Gender-Based Violence: diagnosis, solutions and challenges. Joint contribution from Brazil to the UN special rapporteur on violence against women, recommendations collected by Coding Rights and InternetLab in consultation with Brazilian civil society, CODING RIGHTS; INTERNETLAB, São Paulo, 2017.

Tech-savvy far-right and the role of platforms

It is not something new for misogynist groups to be organized in transnational movements on the Internet in order to coordinate attacks against women and non-binary people. Years ago, in times of Orkut⁹, feminists like the Brazilian professor Lola Aronovich had already denounced the *Incel* groups (from “involuntarily celibate”) for hate crimes¹⁰. It is not by chance that her name has been used to refer to Brazilian Law 13,642 of 2018, commonly known as “Lei Lola”, which deals with hate crimes against women on the Internet. When the law was finally approved, Orkut, once widely used for the articulation of *Incel* groups, had ceased to exist (for commercial reasons), with Google having never given a response to the feminists who denounced these trends.

Even now, with specific legislation in place, the *Incels* continue to find their place in the networks, and the online tactics and discourses of these groups feed back today the narratives and tactics of new far-right political leaders¹¹, who also use the Internet to carry out coordinated attacks against women, LGBT+, black people and other minority segments of the population¹². It is not by coincidence that the insult used by the then deputy and today president of Brazil, Jair Bolsonaro, to attack deputy María do Rosário (“so ugly that she doesn’t deserve to be raped”), is a common narrative in the *Incel* forums. Likewise, the *zoombombing* attacks that occurred during the Brazilian municipal elections, directed mainly against black female candidates, presented neo-Nazi imagery and symbols worshiped by white supremacist groups that have been frequently overlapped with the narratives of the *Incel* groups¹³.

In addition to misogyny and racism, another common aspect of these groups is being tech-savvy. For this reason, manifestations of gender-based political violence tend to come from far-right groups that skillfully exploit development loopholes in social media platforms, or even the logic of their algorithms, to spread hatred and disinformation. These articulations, tactics and narratives have also gained strength by operating on platforms that function according to the logics of *Surveillance Capitalism* (Zuboff, 2019), which, in addition to making personal data more exposed to abuses such as doxxing, favor the creation of algorithms that reward hateful content and misinformation, which are more controversial and therefore produce more clicks, which in turn produces higher profits¹⁴.

As long as the main issue at hand was the gender-based political violence denounced by feminists, these platforms did very little about it, but in the face of scandals such as Cambridge Analytica and the growing wave of disinformation, considered serious attacks on democracy enabled by Internet platforms, the discussion on content moderation has taken another level of priority, both for public authorities and for the policy and safety teams of Big Tech companies. However, the issue of gender-based political violence is still not a central point; on the contrary, a lack of response to the attacks continues to be the rule, as much as the lack of disaggregated

9 TN: Orkut, a social networking service owned and operated by Google, was extremely popular in Brazil from 2004 until its shutdown on September 2014.

10 O dia em que o cara que quis me destruir foi condenado a 41 anos de prisão (The day the guy who wanted to destroy me was sentenced to 41 years in prison), *The Intercept Brazil*, December 21, 2018.

11 Proud Boys, o grupo de ultradireita só de homens que Trump se negou a condenar (Proud Boys, the all-male far-right group that Trump refused to condemn), *El País*, October 1, 2020.

12 The New Right-Wing Extremism: Unified, Tech-Savvy and Emboldened, *The Wall Street Journal*, August 16, 2017.

13 How the alt-right’s sexism lures men into white supremacy, *Vox*, April 26, 2018.

14 The Making of a YouTube Radical, *The New York Times*, June 8, 2019.

data and transparency reports that would allow evaluating trends in gender-based political violence, not to mention the existing reports on training provided by YouTube in Brazil to far-right political groups known for spreading both disinformation and political violence¹⁵.

Gender-based political violence as a threat to democracy and fundamental rights

Especially in politics, violence against female voters and candidates —elected or not— has a symbolic dimension that must be considered: that of sending a message and weakening participation, thus undermining *the exercise of fundamental rights and democratic freedoms*, such as making informed decisions and autonomously exercising historically acquired political rights. Precisely because we are in a representative democratic system, the problem of political violence on the Internet becomes a silencing vector, in a vicious circle that only benefits and consolidates the political elites, reinforcing them in Latin America, so that mostly male, cis, white and rich parliamentarians are elected who, in turn, feed back into this system. All this happens under the same logic that links gender and power to coloniality, as Rita Laura Segato (2016) said when she stated that the natural subject of the public sphere is, “by origin and genealogy”, male, heir to the colonial process and therefore white.

The exclusion and silencing of bodies that are not naturally part of the political elites (the cis hetero white male subject) make the political exercise of women, ethnic minorities and other perspectives that have historically been excluded from the right to vote and political power unfeasible, preventing institutional plurality in the representation of the States. Based on these assumptions, gender-based political violence, by determining which bodies can or cannot freely participate in politics, could be considered an important indicator of the Latin American democratic process and the consolidation of social rights.

15 Grana por Cliques. Fake news a R\$ 25 mil por mês: como o Google treinou e enriqueceu blogueiros antipetistas (Money for Clicks. Fake news at R\$ 25,000 a month: how Google trained and enriched anti-PT bloggers), The Intercept Brazil, November 19, 2019.

Overview of existing protection mechanisms

Legal framework of regional and international treaties and recommendations

- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR,1948) recognizes the right to participate in the government of the country, directly or through freely chosen representatives; it also defines equal access to public functions.
- The American Convention on Human Rights (Pact of San José, 1969) recognizes the political rights of “all citizens”, including participation in public affairs, free choice and equality to access public functions.
- The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 1979) conceptualizes discrimination, considers violence as one of its forms of expression, and recognizes the right of women to political participation.
- The Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence Against Women (Convention of Belém do Pará, 1994), adopted by the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM) of the Organization of American States (OAS), considers violence against women, practiced in public or private spaces, a violation of human rights.
- The Follow-Up Mechanism to the Belém do Pará Convention adopted in Lima, Peru, the Declaration on Political Violence and Harassment Against Women (MESECVI, 2015), in which the national authorities of the States party to the mechanism declared their commitment to “promote the celebration of workshops to educate professionals in the media and social media networks on the subject of discrimination against women in politics by the media and political harassment and/or violence, using a human rights-based approach”, and to “encourage the media, advertising companies and social media networks to develop and/or include in codes of ethics the issue of discrimination against women in politics by the media and the political harassment and/or violence to which they are subjected, underscoring the need to present women in a fair, respectful, broad and varied manner, at all levels of hierarchy and responsibility, eliminating sexist stereotypes that disqualify or hide their leadership in all decision-making spaces.”
- The ILO Convention on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples (C169, 1989) recognizes “the aspirations of these peoples to exercise control over their own institutions”, further enunciating and guaranteeing their political rights.
- The Inter-American Model Law On the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence Against Women in Political Life (MESECVI, OAS, 2017) introduces the construction of an 'umbrella' juridical-political framework: model laws are flexible legislative instruments that can help in the process of proposing and adopting specific protection laws in each country.

National legislation and proposals on gender-based political violence in the region

- **Bolivia**, a pioneer in legislating on the matter, adopted in 2012 the Law Against Harassment and Political Violence Against Women (Law N° 243). An important advance has been the creation of a *Democratic Parity Observatory*, designed to monitor gender and intercultural parity and the political rights of women. The Observatory, together with the Supreme Electoral Tribunal and other actors, is focused on developing indicators of political violence and harassment, as well as a system for monitoring the problem and granting protection, connecting all relevant authorities through technology, in addition to providing training and offering immediate support systems to survivors.
- **Peru**, in its National Plan against Gender Violence 2016-2021 (2016), recognizes political harassment as one of the forms of violence against women to be combated¹⁶. Likewise, Bill No. 673/2016-CR aims to prevent, punish and eradicate political harassment against women.
- **Mexico**, in the absence of a law that typifies gender-based political violence, adopted a Protocol to Address Political Violence Against Women (2016), involving several institutions of the country's electoral justice system¹⁷. More recently, a decree was approved, aimed to modify the set of electoral laws and legislation on violence against women, where it recognizes that gender-based political violence can be expressed even through virtual means, by “disclosing images, messages or private information from a woman candidate or in office, by any physical or virtual means, with the purpose of discrediting her, defame her, denigrate her and challenge her capacity or abilities for politics, based on gender stereotypes.”¹⁸
- The National Assembly of **Ecuador** approved on January 27, 2018 the Comprehensive Organic Law to Prevent and Eradicate Violence against Women, where it recognizes political violence as a specific form of violence¹⁹. Also in Ecuador, the *National Network of Municipal Women* created a call center to deal with cases of violence against women in politics. This hotline offers information on what procedures victims should follow, also offering technical and legal advice so that women know their rights and are better informed about the procedures related to their positions. A similar strategy was developed in Kenya, where the *International Federation of Women Lawyers* (FIDA) developed a text messaging system to report this phenomenon (Krook and Restrepo Sanín, 2016).
- Since 2010, **El Salvador** has a Comprehensive Special Law for a Life Free of Violence for Women (LEIV). Art. 55, on “expressions of violence against women”, establishes sanctions for those carrying out conducts such as “mocking, discrediting, degrading or isolating wom-

16 Types of gender-based violence that the Plan will address [...] h. Political harassment.- Modality of violence that includes “any action, behavior or omission, among others, based on their gender, individually or in a group, that aims to or results in diminishing, nullifying, preventing, obstructing or restricting their political rights, infringes the right of women to a life free of violence and the right to participate in political and public affairs on equal terms with men.

17 The Protocol was presented at the initiative of the Electoral Tribunal of the Judicial Power of the Federation (TEPJF), in conjunction with INE, FEPADE, SEGOB, CEAV, CONAVIM, INMUJERES and FEVIMTRA.

18 Decree by the General Congress of the United Mexican States, April 13, 2020, Art. 20 Ter. § X.

19 Art. 10, § f) Political violence.- It is the violence committed by a person or group of people, directly or indirectly, against women who are candidates, activists, elected, appointed or who hold public office, human rights defenders, feminists, political or social leaders, or against their families. This violence is aimed at shortening, suspending, preventing or restricting their actions or the exercise of their position, or to induce or force them to carry out an action against their will or incur an omission in the performance of their duties, including the lack of access to public goods or other resources for the adequate fulfillment of their functions.

en within their work, educational or community areas, spaces of political or citizen participation, institutional spaces or other analogous.” In this way, the political element is timidly included in a generic law on violence against women, without further specificities regarding the concrete actions taken to respond to this type of violence.

- In **Panama**, Law 184 “On political violence”, enacted on November 25, 2020, defines political violence against women as any form of violence practiced in any public or private sphere, including family or work environments, which affects their political rights.
- In **Paraguay**, the Law for the Comprehensive Protection of Women, Against All Forms of Violence (Law No. 5777, 2016), in its Article 6 on “Forms of violence”, subsection h), defines political violence as “any action carried out against women, whose purpose is to delay, obstruct or prevent them from participating in political life in any of its forms and exercising the rights provided for in this Law.”
- In **Colombia**, there are currently three bills being discussed which aim to address the issue of political violence against women (Bill 04 of 2019, approved in the first debate in the Senate; Bill 050 of 2020, which is currently in the House of Representatives; and Bill 128 of 2020, entitled “Comprehensive Law of Women”, presented in the Senate). Furthermore, the *National Development Plan* contains political commitments for gender equality, including women's participation in power and decision-making scenarios²⁰, in addition to creating a Plan for the Promotion of Political Participation of Women that would include, among others, the prevention and combat of political violence.
- In **Argentina**, the Comprehensive Protection Law to Prevent, Punish and Eradicate Violence against Women in the spheres in which they carry out their Interpersonal Relationships (Law No. 26,485, 2009), in addition to accounting for the types and modalities of violence, established the *Women's National Council* (which existed since 1992) as the enforcement body, entrusting it with a battery of specific functions, among which is the development, implementation and monitoring of a *National Plan of Action for Prevention, Assistance and Eradication of Violence against Women*. In 2017, the INAM (Women's National Institute) was created, replacing the Women's National Council as the governing body of Law No. 26,485. INAM's powers were transferred in 2019 (by Decree 7/2019) to the recently created *Ministry of Women, Genders and Diversity*. In 2020, the Ministry presented a new *National Plan of Action against Gender-Based Violence 2020-2022*, and is currently preparing the *National Plan for Equality in Diversity 2021-2023*. In 2019, Law 26,485 was modified, incorporating in its Article 5 “on types of violence against women”, a subsection 6, which defines political violence as that which “is directed to undermine, nullify, impede, hinder or restrict the political participation of women, violating the right to a political life free of violence and/or the right to participate in public and political affairs on equal terms with men.” Likewise, subsection h) was incorporated into Article 6, which defines public-political violence against women as “that which, based on gender reasons, mediating intimidation, harassment, dishonor, discrediting, persecution, harassment and/or threats, impedes or limits the development of political life or access to political rights and duties, violating current regulations on the political representation of women, and/or discouraging or undermining the political exercise or

20 More details in the report ABC de los Derechos de las Mujeres en el Plan Nacional de Desarrollo 2018-2022 (ABC of Women's Rights in the National Development Plan 2018-2022), p. 45, UN Women, Bogotá, Colombia, October 2019.

political activity of women, occurring in any space of public and political life, such as state institutions, voting precincts, political parties, social organizations, trade unions, the media, among others.” Meanwhile, the Law on Gender Parity in Areas of Political Representation (Law Nº 27,412) was sanctioned in 2017, followed in 2018 by the Law 'Micaela' on Mandatory Training in Gender for All Persons Who Make Up the Three Branches of the State (Law Nº 27,499), which establishes the *Permanent National Program for Institutional Training on Gender and Violence against Women* with the objective of “training and sensitizing” all public officials, encompassing the three branches of the State.

- In **Brazil**, Bill No. 349-A was presented in 2015, which relates to the fight against political-electoral violence and discrimination against women; in 2018, Bill Nº 9699 was presented, which would modify the Electoral Code in order to classify political violence against women as an electoral crime; finally, as of 2020, Bill No. 4963 and Bill Nº 5295 on the subject are being processed by the Congress. Likewise, in December 2019, a campaign was launched by the Chamber of Deputies, which institutionally receives complaints of gender-based political violence occurred in the country. In 2020, this campaign became the Observatory of Political Violence Against Women of the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies.
- In **Uruguay**, the Law on Gender-Based Violence Against Women (Law Nº 19,580, 2017) defines political violence in its Art. 6, subsection L, as “any act of pressure, persecution, harassment or any type of aggression against a woman or her family, in her capacity as candidate, elected or in the exercise of political representation, to prevent or restrict the free exercise of her position or induce her to make decisions against her will”.

This short list that we have just presented indicates how various countries in the region have been carrying out the formulation of laws to protect women from gender-based political violence, although it should be noted that other countries are also debating bills on the subject. Although there are no specific programs and legislation to prevent and combat gender-based political violence in digital contexts, it is possible to use the normative structures and jurisprudence that connect human rights to the end of gender-based violence, as well as treaties of which the States are signatories: both can be protection mechanisms to be activated. In addition to regulatory and normative support, it is necessary to focus on the enforcement of these rights, with educational campaigns by different actors, such as candidates, parties, civil society, platforms and the State.

Complaints as a political act

In some countries, complaints sent to UN rapporteurs and commissions, or to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR/OAS), can be a way of exerting political pressure in search of answers, monitoring current trends and searching for documentation through different networks, mobilizing various entities of civil society, sometimes even transnationally, obtaining information on the phenomenon of political violence and strengthening regional ties and mechanisms.

From the visibility of the narratives contained in the complaints, tools may emerge to help us understand and face the problem from a regional perspective. As an example, we will mention the complaint related to the case of the Brazilian parliamentarian Talíria Petrone (1 of only 13 black women parliamentarians in a total of 513 deputies). During the far-right government of Jair Bolsonaro, and after the murder of Marielle Franco, a colleague and peer of hers in the council chamber, she suffered an intensification in the number of death threats, with at least five phone calls plotting the death of the parliamentarian being intercepted in 2020. The drafting of a complaint letter addressed to three UN rapporteurs²¹, highlighting the lack of protection by the State in a context in which threats to a representative are threats to democracy itself, proved to be an important resource for political articulation to demand an end to violence and, no less relevant, to promote international debate for the creation of a legal-political ecosystem that protects female deputies.

Finally, in places where the protection of human rights and the implementation of international treaties are not as effective, regional monitoring and reporting mechanisms can be another resource to be used, so that States comply with the agreed principles and standards. Below, we present some initiatives underway in Latin America, that monitor the problem and seek to put an end to gender-based political violence on the Internet.

Examples of mechanisms, observatories and other initiatives to confront gender-based political violence in the region

- **Observatorio de Paridad Democrática (OPD), Bolivia** – The *Democratic Parity Observatory* is a specialized unit dependent on the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE), whose line of work and action is parity democracy.
- **Asociación de Concejalas de Bolivia (ACOBOL), Bolivia** – The *Association of Female Councilors of Bolivia* is a nationwide entity gathering the female Councilors and Mayors of the country.
- **Fórum de Mulheres de Partido, Brazil** – The *Party Women Forum* is an organization that brings together women from 32 different parties in Brazil.

²¹ Complaint letter from Brazilian Federal Deputy Talíria Petrone, addressed to the UN special rapporteurs Agnes Callamard (Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions), E. Tendayi Achiume (Special Rapporteur on Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance) and Mary Lawlor (Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders).

- **Tretaqui.org, Brazil** – The *TRETAqui* platform receives complaints of political violence on the Internet during elections. They also issued a Descriptive record of complaints as a contribution to the OAS Electoral Observation Mission.
- **Monitora, Brasil!, Brazil** – The *Monitora, Brasil!* app, a tool for monitoring Federal Deputies and Senators, tracked hate speech and political violence against women on social media during the 2020 elections.
- **Observatorio de la Participación Política de las Mujeres, Costa Rica** – The *Observatory on Political Participation of Women* keeps a record of cases and system of complaints related to political violence.
- **Luchadoras, México** – *Luchadoras* is a cyberfeminist collective that carries out campaigns against gender-based violence and online political violence.
- **Equipo Latinoamericano de Justicia y Género (ELA), Argentina** – The *Latin American Team for Justice and Gender* is a civil society entity that develops publications and collaborates with electoral observatories.
- **Instituto Panameño de Derecho y Nuevas Tecnologías (IPANDETEC), Panamá** – The *Panamanian Institute of Law and New Technologies* is an association based in Panama that works for the Central American region. They recently published a report on the situation of online gender-based violence against female candidates during the 2020 elections in Guatemala.
- **Parliamentary Network for Gender Equality (PNGE), ParlAméricas** – With the support of women parliamentarians from all over Latin America and the Caribbean, in 2015 they launched an action plan that encourages the use of different strategies to prevent violence against women in politics.

Recommendations

Platforms

- Social media platforms must expand transparency measures in relation to their content moderation practices, publishing periodic reports with information on what type of publications are reported and which ones are eliminated, either by court order or by their own platform's moderators, as well as what the rationale behind the decision to remove or keep a post is.
- Said reports must present disaggregated data, published with the consent of those involved, that allow an evaluation of which profiles are most affected by manifestations of political violence.
- Platforms must offer accessible reporting mechanisms, which should include categories of political violence and gender-based political violence, as well as the possibility of appealing the decisions they make.
- Once content is removed, they must provide information on what type of prioritization that content has received from the platform's algorithms before being removed, so that it can also be measured to what extent those algorithms have benefited contents that propagate hate speech or misinformation, as well as to grant a similar reach to content produced as a right of reply.

Governments

- Governments must provide a legal framework for the protection of personal data, digital rights and the fight against political violence, safeguarding anonymity so as not to promote the massive identification of users, thus complying with the principles of freedom of expression and free access to information.
- At the parliamentary level, channels should be established to report political violence, as well as response mechanisms.
- In the field of electoral courts, the training of lawyers, judges and public servants should be promoted to act directly against gender-based political violence.
- In the field of electoral justice, specific penalties must be established for candidates and parties that promote forms of political violence as a political marketing strategy.
- Educational measures and institutional campaigns must be carried out beyond the regulations themselves.

Candidates

- Keep a record of all violences occurred on the Internet.
- File complaints to create a new jurisprudential understanding based on existing laws, in a possible articulation with Human Rights as an instrument for protection.
- Promote the creation of support networks to face political violence, documenting and reporting each event.
- Adopt a multisectoral approach to confront violence, using administrative, legal, communication, documentation and digital security strategies.

Parties

- Support the candidates for the implementation of the recommendations of the previous item.
- Maintain a supra-partisan approach: the mobilization must involve different political parties, since coalitions are essential for the effectiveness and sustainability of the measures.
- Follow good practices in the application of existing regulatory structures.
- Inspect and sanction candidates who commit political violence in any of its forms.

Civil Society

- Create and coordinate national observatories that specifically monitor gender-based political violence on the Internet, following the examples of Brazil and Mexico.
- Coordinate agendas with other movements that promote gender equality, in a framework of intersectionality.
- Put pressure on the public and private sectors to receive complaints and provide disaggregated data so as to be able to monitor the progress of those complaints. Track political violence on the Internet according to sex, race or ethnicity, in order to identify the impact of these indicators.
- Carry out research and promote intersectional debates on gender-based political violence on the Internet, and encourage the crossing of these perspectives with analyses on the use of technologies in different forms of gender violence suffered by journalists, territorial defenders and other functions in which women and non-binary people lobby for political change.

Political violence and gender-based violence on the Internet are not frequently analyzed together: the contents and authors that connect them are rare and there are no specific laws to combat them in the digital ecosystem. More than ever, we defend the intersection between the field of study of gender-based political violence and that which addresses digital rights, analyzing the aspects of privacy and freedom of expression in the moderation of content, as well as questioning the dimensions of the power of social media platforms. This complex view would represent an important framework for the socio-political analysis of attacks on diversity and inclusion in the political sphere, and may offer practical tools to address this problem on the way to a more diverse society and a political system whose decisions are not just the reflection of a ruling class.

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