



TECHNOLOGY & ELECTIONS

Technology-facilitated gender-based violence against women politicians in Paraguay

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TECHNOLOGY-FACILITATED GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN POLITICIANS IN PARAGUAY

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TEDIC is a non-governmental organization founded in 2012, whose mission is the defense and promotion of human rights in the digital environment. Among its main issues of interest are freedom of speech, privacy, access to knowledge and gender on the Internet.

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ABSTRACT

The omnipresence of technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) reflects a global reality where geographical barriers no longer limit its scope. The interconnection of people's lives with the digital world has expanded the domain of structural violence into these spaces, posing a significant challenge. The complexity of these forms of violence often escapes general understanding, leading to their minimization and underestimation. It is crucial to recognize that digital abuses do not exist in a vacuum separate from the physical world; their impacts are tangible and profound for the victims. While there are common themes and underlying threads, this violence manifests differently worldwide, taking on varying appearances depending on regional and national contexts and the terms used to describe and understand online misogyny realities. Therefore, this research aims to comprehend the specific common patterns in Paraguay, to devise more evidence-based, assertive social, legal, and political solutions to this problem. It endeavors, with great effort and detail, to understand not only survivors but also the nature and configurations of the perpetrators: who they are, why they commit these acts, how they manifest, and their impacts, to explore mechanisms for preventing and mitigating their online presence safely and freely in the future.

KEYWORDS: *Technology-facilitated gender-based violence, TFGBV, women in politics, Paraguay.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Violence, as various theorists have emphasized, is not simply a static fact, but rather a dynamic and contested concept that is constructed in the social, historical and cultural sphere. In this research, the authors will strive to categorize different forms of political violence through technology-facilitated gender-based violence against women politicians in Paraguay, as a way of naming the phenomena that affect coexistence among diverse groups in society in order to prevent and combat such situations.

Throughout this exploratory research, some concepts may be interchangeable in certain situations, as they are intrinsically related to the inequalities that underlie the social and conservative structure. For example, political violence may be intertwined with racism, age discrimination, and LGBTQI+. At other times, connections will be evident between political violence, technology-facilitated gender-based violence, and hate speech, distinct but potentially overlapping concepts.

Although the authors understand that these concepts are intertwined and articulate with each other, they recognize the importance of naming each of these practices. Doing so opens the door for them to be properly categorized, examined, prevented and combated individually and collectively. Therefore, they have organized some distinctions that will serve as a guide throughout this reading, with the purpose of providing a clear framework for understanding and addressing the complexity of violence in various forms and contexts in the Paraguayan political space.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The term “gender-based violence” experienced a significant increase in relevance during the 1990s. In 1991, the United Nations (UN) expert group on violence against women concluded that existing international instruments did not adequately address or consider gender-based violence as a crime. It was from 1993 onwards that the term began to gain greater attention, mainly due to its use in UN documents such as the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna in 1993. The spread of the term became widespread during the IV World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. This Conference reinforced the integral nature of women’s and girls’ rights as human rights and made progress in the development of public policies aimed at defending these rights. This set of norms that appeared in this period is categorized as second generation norms (Vera, 2009).

The term “gender-based violence” is derived from the English translation “gender-based violence” or “gender violence”, and refers to all types of violence -whether physical, sexual, economic, psychological, among others- against women due to their subordinate status in patriarchal societies. According to Mercedes Buonghermini, it is important to understand that violence should not be equated simply with conflict or aggressiveness. Rather, it is defined as a form of aggression (Vera, 2009).

Nieves Rico, a member of ECLAC's Women and Development Unit, defines gender-based violence as the manifestation of inequalities in power relations between men and women, perpetuating the subordination and devaluation of the feminine in relation to the masculine. According to Rico, this form of violence is rooted in patriarchy as a symbolic system, which generates daily practices that deny women's rights and reproduce gender imbalance. (Vera, 2009)

The parameter to determine whether or not women in politics suffer discrimination based on sex [gender] is to analyze whether or not men had to go through all these questioning to which women are subjected¹.

Regarding the research, various studies and organizations around the world have addressed the issue of political violence. In 2002, Fischer described it as “any action or threat, whether organized or sporadic, aimed at intimidating, physically harming, blackmailing or mistreating a political actor with the objective of influencing an electoral process, either to determine it, delay it or affect it in some way” (Fischer, 2002). Although theoretically any candidate or politician could be the target of this violence, in practice, it tends to be directed specifically towards certain groups, especially women, Afro-descendants, indigenous people and members of the LGTBQ+ community. (Fischer, 2002)

Political violence during electoral processes, known as “electoral violence”, is characterized by its timely occurrence during official campaign periods, involving disputes between candidates, political parties and coalitions (UN Women & UNDP, 2017). Its main purpose is to influence electoral results by disrupting the dynamics between contestants. In this sense, it is vital to have formal electoral management, oversight and control mechanisms in place to prevent and stop this type of violence. (Lauris & Hashizume, 2020)

During the 20th century, the predominant focus of the international community was on ensuring that women could exercise their right to vote and participate in politics, which culminated in the creation of the Convention on the Political Rights of Women in 1953, considered as first generation norms. (UN, 1953) However, with the arrival of the 21st century, new challenges arose, and concern shifted to the protection of women against political violence. This shift in focus led to the adoption of various international legal instruments, such as the Inter-American Model Law to Prevent, Punish and Eradicate Violence against Women in Political Life. (OAS, 2017)

The concept of political violence adopted by the Inter-American Model Law, encompasses any action, conduct or omission of a physical, sexual, psychological, moral, economic or symbolic nature, which impairs or nullifies the enjoyment, exercise or recognition of political rights. There are overlaps between this concept and that of misogyny (hostility directed at women because they are women) when political violence is directed toward women. (Baker & Jurasz, 2019) This law recognizes that political violence against women can manifest itself in a variety of contexts, including political parties, the media, and social media.

Along the same lines, the articulation between political violence and hate speech can be considered. Hate speech is understood as any discursive act that aims to intimidate and incite hatred and is therefore prohibited by the Convention. (RELE, 2004)

1 El País. 2023. ¿Is everything gender-based political violence? Accusations dominate the electoral campaign. <https://elpais.com/mexico/2023-07-22/es-todo-violencia-politica-de-genero-las-acusaciones-dominan-la-campana-electoral.html>

Specifically in the context of social media, according to the UN Special Rapporteur on Online Violence against Women and Girls in 2018, Dubravka Simonovic, political violence directed at women can have devastating consequences, such as diminishing their online presence, withdrawal from the public sphere and erosion of democratic exercise and good governance, resulting in a democratic deficit. (Dubravka Šimonović, 2018)

In Simonovic's words:

(...) women involved in political activities are directly targeted, threatened, harassed and even killed for their work. They receive online threats, usually of a misogynistic nature, often sexual and specifically gender-related. The violent nature of these threats often leads to self-censorship (...)

The growing awareness of the importance of addressing political violence directed at women culminated in a significant milestone in 2015, when the Organization of American States (OAS) adopted the Declaration on Political Violence and Harassment against Women. This declaration recognizes that political violence against women encompasses a wide range of actions, behaviors, and omissions, both individual and group, that are intended to undermine, impede, or restrict their political rights. (OAS, 2015)

This type of violence not only seeks to silence women's voices in the political arena, but also undermines their recognition as legitimate political actors. By discouraging the exercise and continuation of their political careers, political violence creates significant barriers to women's equal participation in the public sphere. Therefore, the adoption of specific measures to address and prevent political violence against women becomes an urgent necessity to ensure gender equality and strengthen democracy at all levels. (Krook & Sanín, 2016)

According to international norms, political violence against women encompasses all actions or negligence by individuals, public officials or other actors that target a woman because of her gender, have a differentiated impact on her, affect her dignity as a woman or disproportionately harm her, with the purpose or result of weakening or eliminating her political-electoral rights, including when they seek to undermine her performance in office. This form of violence can manifest itself through physical, psychological, symbolic, sexual, patrimonial, economic or femicide violence, among others.

Research conducted in 2016 by the Inter-Parliamentary Union, which involved women MPs from 39 countries, revealed that 81.8% of the interviewees were victims of psychological violence in the workplace, while 44.4% reported having been threatened. In addition, some 23% of the women surveyed claimed to have faced political violence within parliament. For 3.7% of them, the attacks hindered their performance in office. (NDI, 2021)

Among other examples is the resignation in 2023 of the Prime Minister of New Zealand². With these words, Jacinda Arden, of 42 years old, has justified her decision to step down as Prime Minister of New Zealand, nine months before the general election:

I am human, we politicians are human. We give it our all, as much time as we can. And then the time comes. For me, the time has come.

In the same year, two striking events happened, the first one is that the first Brazilian trans woman Neon Cunha also resigned her position as São Paulo legislator³ for health reasons, and the second event involves Iceland's Prime Minister, Katrín Jakobsdóttir, who joined the women's strike against the wage gap and gender-based violence⁴. This highlights that even in countries with very high democratic indexes, there is still a lot of inequality in relation to gender.

In Paraguay, acts of political violence are not exempt. Recent events in Congress highlight these practices of gender-based violence in politics. For example, the case of Senator Katty Gonzalez of the "Encuentro Nacional" Party. She was expelled from Congress with votes from the ruling party and some allies of the opposition, citing alleged irregularities. She was removed with 23 votes in favor, although the regulations required 30 votes to remove a Senator. The accusations included the alleged misuse of influence to hire a female staff member and endorse a trip while she continued receiving her salary. However, so far, no criminal charges have been filed for the irregularities attributed to González⁵.

Therefore, the predominantly male environment in politics around the world and especially in Latin America is also not receptive to women's participation in decision-making. All this creates a hostile and discouraging environment for women interested in entering institutional politics. To achieve equitable representation in power, it is crucial to stop this violence quickly. Aggressors enforce expectations of submissiveness towards women, reflecting the violence they face in everyday life. Silencing women in politics not only affects them individually, but also has an impact on the advancement of gender rights in general⁶.

2 El País. January 2023. Jacinda Arden announces her resignation as Prime Minister of New Zealand. Available at: <https://elpais.com/internacional/2023-01-19/jacinda-arden-anuncia-su-dimision-como-primera-ministra-de-nueva-zelanda.html>

3 Instituto Update. June 2023. Decidi me candidatar quando percebi que me colocar, me posicionar e assumir uma responsabilidade política era a única opção. Available at: <https://www.institutoupdate.org.br/decidi-me-candidatar-quando-percebi-que-me-colocar-me-posicionar-e-assumir-uma-responsabilidade-politica-era-a-unica-opcao/>

4 El País. October 2023. The Prime Minister of Iceland joins the women's strike against the wage gap and gender-based violence. Available at: <https://elpais.com/sociedad/2023-10-24/la-primera-ministra-de-islandia-se-une-a-la-huelga-de-mujeres-contra-la-brecha-salarial-y-la-violencia-machista.html>

5 CNN Español. 2024. Senator Katty Gonzalez expelled from the Paraguayan Congress. CNN. 2024 <https://cnnespanol.cnn.com/2024/02/14/expulsan-paraguay-senadora-katty-gonzalez-orix/>

6 Instituto Update. June 2023. Violência de gênero é o grande desafio para as mulheres na política. Available at: <https://www.institutoupdate.org.br/violencia-de-genero-e-o-grande-desafio-para-as-mulheres-na-politica/>

2.1. Legal framework

Paraguay's commitment to gender equality and the eradication of violence against women is reflected in its adherence to international treaties such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (UN, 1979) and the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women (Belem do Para) (OAS, 1994). Despite these commitments and the efforts made by both the State and Civil Society, significant challenges remain in the materialization of a real and effective equality that ensures women a life free of violence.

Article 1 of the CEDAW Convention, ratified by Paraguay through Law 1215/86, defines the notion of discrimination against women.

(...) any distinction, exclusion or restriction based on sex that aims to or results in diminishing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, regardless of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other sphere (...)

Likewise, General Recommendation 19, adopted by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women at its 11th session in 1992, reinforces this idea by stating that violence against women constitutes a form of discrimination that seriously impairs their ability to enjoy rights and freedoms on an equal basis with men. (CEDAW, 1992)

The Belém do Para Convention was ratified by the Paraguayan Congress through Law 605/95 (National Congress, 1995). This instrument understands as violence against women:

(...) any action or conduct, based on gender, that causes death, harm, or physical, sexual or psychological suffering to a woman, whether in the public or the private sphere.

Article 7 states the following:

The State Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country and, in particular, shall ensure to women, on equal terms with men, the right to:

- a) Vote in all public elections and referendums and to be eligible for all bodies whose members are elected by public vote;
- b) Participate in the formulation of government policies and their implementation, and to hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government;
- c) Participate in non-governmental organizations and associations involved in the public and political life of the country.

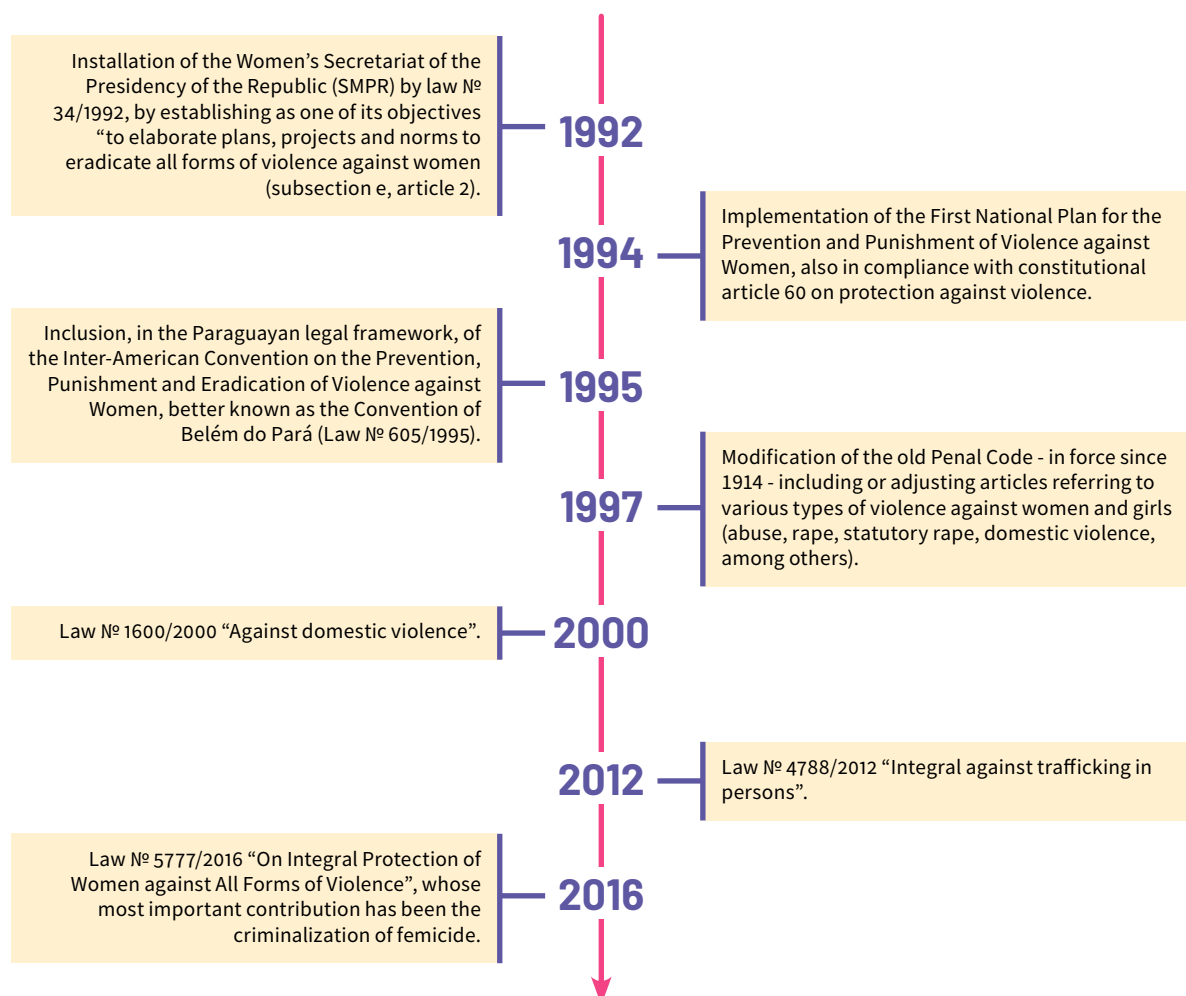
Under the terms of the Convention, violence against women constitutes a violation of human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as limiting their recognition.

There is also the Follow-up Mechanism of the Belém do Pará Convention (MESECVI). This Mechanism adopted the Declaration on Violence and Political Harassment against Women in Lima, in October 2015. In this declaration, the States Parties of the Mechanism expressed their commitment to promote training workshops for media and social media professionals on discrimination against women politicians, as well as on political violence and harassment, from a human rights perspective. They also urged media outlets, advertising companies and social media to include in their codes of ethics provisions related to discrimination against women in the media and the political violence and harassment they face, emphasizing the need to present women in a fair, respectful, broad and varied manner at all levels of hierarchy and responsibility.

This implies eliminating sexist stereotypes that disqualify and make invisible the protagonism and leadership of women in all areas of decision-making (AL SUR, 2021)

Article 48 of the 1992 Paraguayan Constitution enshrines the principle of equality of rights between men and women, including political participation, and establishes the responsibility of the State to adopt measures to guarantee effective equality. Other relevant articles include Article 4: The right to life, physical and psychological integrity; Article 24: Religious and ideological freedom; Article 26: Freedom of speech and press; Article 33: Privacy; Article 28: Right to equality and non-discrimination; Article 60: Right to protection against violence in the family. (Constituent Assembly, 1992).

According to gender expert Myriam González, after the fall of dictator General Stroessner and during the transition to democracy, public policies aimed at preventing, sanctioning and eradicating violence against women emerged. Her summary of the milestones by year is presented below in a diagram. (González, 2021)



Women represent almost half of the Paraguayan population, yet they continue to be victims of violence because of their gender (González, 2021). This violence, which affects women, girls and adolescents, is a clear manifestation of the inequality and discrimination entrenched in society. In response to this problem, the country enacted Law No. 5777/16, on “Comprehensive Protection of Women against all forms of Violence”, which came into full force on December 29, 2017. (National Congress, 2016)

This law represents a fundamental tool for the Paraguayan State in the fight against gender-based violence. It establishes a comprehensive public policy aimed at the prevention of violence against women and the implementation of mechanisms for attention, protection, sanction and comprehensive reparation. It recognizes and defines 15 types of violence against women, addressing situations in both the public and private spheres.

Article 5 of the law defines telematic violence as follows:

It is the action through which messages, photographs, audios, videos or other content that affect the dignity or privacy of women are disseminated or published through current information and communication technologies, including the use of these media to promote the objectification, submission or exploitation of women. The term “objectification” shall be understood as the action of reducing women to the condition of an object.

While the researchers welcome the fact that this violence is included in the law, its definition is incomplete as it focuses only on the non-consensual dissemination of intimate images⁷ and exposure by the media. It leaves out online harassment, threats, stalking and access, discriminatory expressions, discrediting, unauthorized access to personal information, identity theft, abuse, surveillance of their communications and mobility through GPS and sexual exploitation related to technologies. (TEDIC, 2021)

Two legislative proposals are currently in the Congress, one from 2021 “To prevent, sanction and eradicate gender-based political violence against women”, which has not yet been approved in the first constitutional stage⁸, and the other from 2023 “To prevent, sanction and eradicate universal cyberbullying in Paraguay”⁹.

7 This concept will be developed further below.

8 Bill. File: S-2110141 <http://silpy.congreso.gov.py/expediente/123379>

9 Bill. File: S-2300448 <https://silpy.congreso.gov.py/web/expediente/129408>

2.2. Political participation of women in Paraguay

Since the beginning of the 20th century, demands began for the recognition of women's right to vote in Paraguay. In 1919, the first bill was presented for this purpose, however, it was not until 1961 that the corresponding legislation was passed. Following this approval, two women obtained parliamentary seats in the subsequent elections.

The demand for women's right to participate in government gained strength especially in the 1990s, with proposals to include a women's quota in the electoral code. Starting in 1991, political parties began to include these quotas in their statutes, with the Colorado Party (ANR) being the first to do so. Finally, in 1996, a new electoral law was passed that incorporated a 20% quota for women's participation in political positions. (Soto, 2015).

While it is important to reflect on progress in terms of cultural changes and the expansion of rights, it is also important to recognize that women in Paraguay continue to face significant socioeconomic inequalities and gaps in political representation. These disparities are evident in international indicators, such as the 2021 Global Gender Gap Index, which ranks Paraguay in number 86 out of 156 countries analyzed in terms of gender equality, and 94 in terms of women's political empowerment. (IDEA, 2023)

The situation is also reflected in the world ranking of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, where Paraguay ranked in number 131 out of 193 countries in 2022 in female representation in national parliaments. Despite the efforts made during the democratic period, women's political participation is still very limited. Currently, their presence in elected positions remains among the lowest in Latin America, still far from the average of 34.6% of women elected to parliaments in the Americas by the end of 2022.

These figures highlight the need to redouble efforts to promote gender equality and increase women's political participation in Paraguay. Concrete policies and measures are needed to facilitate women's access to decision-making spaces and to ensure their equal representation at all levels of government. Only through sustained commitment and coordinated actions will it be possible to move towards a more inclusive and just Paraguayan society for all its citizens (IDEA, 2023).

Article 32 of the Paraguayan Electoral Code establishes adequate mechanisms to promote the participation of women in elective positions. This aims to guarantee their presence in political spaces, including parties, movements and alliances, by encouraging the inclusion of women in electoral lists. (National Congress, 2014)

In this sense, the present research celebrates that women's political participation in Paraguay has been a constant throughout the country's history, reflecting their active contribution in all social, cultural, economic and political spheres. Being half of the population, half of the citizenship and half of the voter registry, Paraguayan women have demonstrated their commitment by participating and supporting various political parties and movements.

However, despite overcoming numerous obstacles, women's political representation remains limited, reaching barely 20% of decision-making positions at the national, departmental or municipal level. This gap reflects a significant challenge in the pursuit of gender equity in the political sphere. (Soto, 2015)

Along the same lines, Bareiro (2023) examines this phenomenon in contexts where, in the last five years, women have begun to occupy decision-making positions in political parties in the country. She identifies a common pattern in the rise of women to these high positions within their parties, attributing it to an unsustainable internal crisis that leads them to intervene from their traditional gender role, especially associated with caregiving, to solve it. (Bareiro, 2023)

Bareiro is highly critical of an approach that only seeks solutions of women's quotas in power to reach the numbers or percentages suggested by international standards. She argues that the presence of women in positions of power does not guarantee equality if it does not challenge or threaten established male authority. In many cases, women are placed in political roles to mitigate conflict or to fulfill a superficial diversity requirement, but without receiving the necessary support to push for meaningful changes in gender policies. According to Bareiro, women's real influence in political power only materializes when it is exercised with an active gender perspective, advocating for reforms that promote equity and full recognition of women's rights in the political arena. In addition, she highlights that the structural violence underlying society is also invisible and, therefore, tends to be overlooked in political debates, making it difficult to achieve significant gender changes in the country. (Bareiro, 2023)

On the other hand, in 2019, the modification of the Electoral Code was approved through Law 6.318, which introduced a new election system. This change replaced the proportional election method through closed and blocked lists with a system of closed, unblocked lists with preferential voting, while maintaining proportional distribution. Therefore, it is imperative to analyze how these new modifications to the electoral system impact the application of the 20% quota and the position mandate within the parties, provisions that have been in force since 1996. In addition, it is essential to evaluate their potential effects on the representation of women in elected positions. (National Congress, 2019)

The final report of the European Union Election Observation Mission (EU-EOM) on the April 2023 elections in the country revealed that a total of 2995 women ran for various public offices. According to the report, women with public profiles on social media platforms received a significant amount of both supportive and offensive comments on their posts. To assess this, an analysis was conducted on social media X between March 20 and April 27, 2023, revealing that digital violence directed toward male and female candidates did not differ significantly. There were 238 offensive messages directed at male candidates, compared to 170 offensive messages toward female candidates. However, 13% of the messages directed at female candidates were related to their gender, physical appearance, and performance. (European Union, 2023)

Indigenous women candidates had a limited presence on the platform, preferring mainly Facebook. The analysis conducted by the EU-EOM alerts on the offensive nature of the comments directed at these profiles, which focused on their physical appearance and their ability to hold public office. (European Union, 2023)

The recommendation of the EU-EOM in the final report was:

The electoral administration, in cooperation with national organizations engaged in fact-checking, should partner with online platforms to help moderate content and reduce the spread of disinformation.

The results of the 2023 national elections were characterized by the dominance of the National Republican Association (ANR) - Colorado Party in power¹⁰. Currently, the Senate is composed of 11 women out of a total of 45 seats¹¹, while the Chamber of Deputies has 18 women out of a total of 80 seats¹².

On the other hand, in the cabinet of new President Santiago Peña, the Executive Branch has appointed 5 women out of 19 ministerial positions. However, out of the 13 general directorates, only 2 are led by women¹³. In the Supreme Court of Justice, out of the 9 Ministers, only one is a woman¹⁴. In the Electoral Tribunal (TSJE) there are no women ministers¹⁵.

Moreover, women's struggle for full political participation faces an additional barrier: gender-based political violence directed at those who engage in political and public life. This violence, perpetrated by misogynistic and patriarchal-minded individuals, as well as by those who use their public platform to defame and belittle women, undermines the fundamental principles of Paraguayan democracy, which is based on participation, representation and plurality.

10 In the Senate, out of a total of 45 senators, 23 belong to the National Republican Association (ANR), leaving the remaining 22 seats distributed among the other parties. On the other hand, in the chamber of Deputies, out of the 80 deputies, 48 are members of the ANR, according to the information provided by the Honorable Chamber of Deputies in the section of Deputies by Department for the 2023-2028 term. Available at: <https://www.senado.gov.py/index.php/noticias/noticias-presidencia/11539-titular-del-congreso-nacional-participo-al-acto-de-proclamacion-denuenas-autoridades-2023-05-30-17-44-21> y <https://www.diputados.gov.py/index.php/diputados-nacionales/diputados-por-departamento-periodo-2023-2028>

11 La Nación. 2023. Historic, out of 45 Senate seats, 11 will be occupied by women. Available at: <https://www.lanacion.com.py/politica/2023/06/06/historico-de-45-bancas-en-el-senado-11-ocuparan-mujeres/>

12 ABC. 2023. The new parliament will have a record number of women. Available at: <https://www.abc.com.py/politica/2023/05/02/nuevo-parlamento-tendra-presencia-record-de-mujeres/>

13 ABC. 2023. The Ministers of Santiago Peña's Cabinet. Available at: <https://www.abc.com.py/politica/2023/08/10/los-ministros-del-gabinete-de-santiago-pena/>

14 Ministers of the SCJ. Available at: <https://www.pj.gov.py/ministros/67-ministros-de-la-csj>

15 Composition of TSJE. Available at: <https://tsje.gov.py/composicion.html>

3. TECHNOLOGY-FACILITATED GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Digital violence has a disproportionate impact on women in politics, who face more aggressions compared to men. (UN Women, 2021) This phenomenon reflects a trend that has also been observed in other types of violence, where political aggressions have migrated to the digital space. While men are often subjected to insults or shameful accusations online, women suffer harassment, sexualized attacks and violent threats, directed at both themselves and their closest family members. (Barrera et al., 2018) The consequences of this violence are devastating. In addition to the fear and anxiety caused by threats, many victims resort to self-censorship as a form of protection¹⁶.

Research by the Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI) published in 2023 focused on 18 countries with 18,149 interviews on gender-based digital violence, shares its main findings, highlighting that 60% of all respondents have experienced some form of online harm. Nearly 25% of them are targeted because of their gender identity. Also, 30% of respondents who experienced technology-facilitated violence and identified as transgender or gender diverse reported severe impacts on their mental health, including suicidal thoughts. Nearly 30% of women reported negative impacts on their mental health and 23% felt they could no longer interact freely online after experiencing this type of violence. (CIGI, 2023)

During electoral contests, the effects of digital violence go beyond affecting the individual freedom of speech of women and their families. They also impact on a collective level, as silencing them deprives society of their voices. This phenomenon has serious implications for democracy as a whole.

Moreover, for women, online violence does not end with elections. Women, in politics and in public life, suffer a continuous level of abuse, while abusive online content directed at men often softens between elections. (UN Women, 2021)

As mentioned in the section on the definition of gender-based violence, this concept has undergone and continues to undergo an evolutionary process over time. The same applies to the concept of digital gender-based violence.

In her 2018 report, Rapporteur Simonovic noted that she did not intend to define or catalog all forms of online violence against women and girls. Furthermore, she acknowledged that the rapid development of technology and digital spaces inevitably gives rise to new and different manifestations of violence against women (Simonovic, 2018).

On the other hand, while there is debate about the appropriate terminology to describe patterns of online and technology-facilitated gender-based violence, some experts prefer the term “technology-facilitated gender-based violence” (TFGBV) rather than “digital violence against women and girls.” This is because the latter term excludes non-binary people, gender nonconforming people and other marginalized gender identities who also face a high risk of technology-facilitated violence. The use of the term “gender-based” reflects the inclusivity and intersectionality of social locations central to research in this area. In addition, it is noted that CEDAW General Recommendation 35 has updated its focus to include online violence, recognizing that gender-based violence against women occurs in all spaces of human interaction, including technological environments. CEDAW remains an important tool for influencing States to develop appropriate legislation in this regard.

16 Karisma. 2021. Carolina Botero. Women’s political participation to avoid digital violence. Available at: <https://web.karisma.org.co/la-participacion-politica-de-las-mujeres-pasa-por-evitar-la-violencia-digital/>

(...) any act committed, assisted, aggravated or amplified by the use of information and communication technologies or other digital tools, resulting in or likely to result in physical, sexual, psychological, social, political or economic harm, or other violations of rights and freedoms”. (UN Women. 2023. Technology-Facilitated Violence against Women-Report of the Foundational Meeting of the Expert Group).

Brazilian expert Mariana Valente and Suzie Dunn, professor at the University of Ottawa and researcher on the subject, agree in calling this problem Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV). (Valente, 2023)

At the time of writing this research, the United Nations¹⁷ is exploring various ontologies and terminologies associated with digital violence, including terms such as online abuse, technology-facilitated abuse, digital abuse, telematic violence, techno-discrimination, among others. Although these terms share similarities, distinctions have emerged in the identification of groups and individuals affected by TFGBV, ranging from women and girls to a broader approach that transcends traditional gender categorization.

Currently, the trend views technology-facilitated gender-based violence as a continuum of the gender-based violence that women already suffer in physical spaces (Šimonović, UN, 2018). However, recognizing the continuity between online and offline does not imply ignoring the specific challenges presented by the digital environment. For example, the Internet has increased the speed of information dissemination, which has exacerbated the severity of the non-consensual dissemination of intimate images, a problem that already existed but now occurs on a much larger scale. (Sequera, 2021)

Conditions also arise for new forms of violence such as digital identity theft, surveillance of devices, doxing, deepfakes, stalking, among others¹⁸. There are insufficient official statistics to understand the size of the problem of technology-facilitated gender-based violence, as is the case with many forms of violence, particularly sexual violence.

According to Valente (2023), considering violence in virtual practices can also be approached from a perspective that, instead of attempting to theoretically define violence, explores its relationship with gender and sexuality. She also considers that misogyny is a system that seeks to monitor and perpetuate the subordination of women and can manifest itself intentionally or indirectly, exerting its influence within the intricacies of these spaces of female interaction and empowerment. (Valente, 2023)

In Paraguay, there has been an increase in reports of digital violence against women recently. An emblematic case is that of Belén Whittingslow, who in 2013 accused Christian Kriskovich, a professor at the Catholic University and its representative to the Magistrates Council, of online sexual harassment. Despite filing her complaint, the judicial authorities dismissed the case. Whittingslow is currently facing two lawsuits directly related to her initial complaint. Due to the lack of legal protection in Paraguay, Whittingslow sought refuge in Uruguay. (Sequera, 2023) This case is considered by TEDIC as an example of technology-facilitated gender-based violence and highlights the lack of access to justice in similar situations in Paraguay. This case is currently being evaluated by the commission of the Inter-American Human Rights System (IAHRS)¹⁹.

17 The 68th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). UNFPA- TFGBV. March 2024. New York.

18 TEDIC. Digital Violence is Real. Available at <https://violenciadigital.tedic.org>

19 TEDIC. 2021. TEDIC and CEJIL present a petition before the IACHR against the Paraguayan State. Available at: <https://www.tedic.org/tedic-y-cejil-presentan-una-peticion-ante-la-cidh-contra-el-estado-paraguay/>

3.1. Manifestations of technology-facilitated gender-based violence

Technology-facilitated gender-based violence shares similarities with offline gender-based violence, but has particular characteristics that make it unique. Specific forms of violence in the digital environment that mainly affect women include the unauthorized dissemination of intimate images, doxxing (disclosure of personal information obtained in an abusive manner), online harassment through bothersome messages and the creation of fake profiles, the closing or hacking of accounts, the spread of memes and disinformation to attack or discredit women in the exercise of their political citizenship, among others.

TEDIC has currently identified 21 types of digital violence²⁰. These include photo and video manipulation, online identity theft, workplace harassment in digital environments (mobbing) and unsolicited sending of sexual content. This number is increasing due to significant regional and Latin American efforts to understand the complexity of this phenomenon as it moves online, and to name it from a global south perspective. Identifying these specific forms of digital violence is crucial to adequately address the problem and develop effective prevention and protection strategies.

Among the 21 forms of violence identified, this research will focus on the most recurrent or easily identified by victims of technology-facilitated gender-based violence.

Online harassment

Online harassment encompasses a variety of unwanted digital communications, from brief incidents such as a racist or sexist comment to long-term organized attacks. These attacks can discredit women's work, send death threats and gamify harassment towards women. While large-scale attacks are easily identifiable, it is also important to recognize smaller-scale actions with harmful effects. Online harassment can cause mental distress, fear in victims, and generally, victims of online harassment tend to be women, with a significant focus on their gender and race. From an intersectional perspective, women with multiple marginalities face significantly higher rates of online harassment, with abusers commenting on their skin color, religion, disability and other characteristics. LGBTQ+ women, people with disabilities, racialized, or those belonging to minority ethnic groups face more persistent harassment. (Bareiro, 2023)

Disinformation

Gender disinformation becomes a powerful strategy to weaken women politicians and discourage their active participation in politics. This disinformation takes the form of rumors, personal attacks, defamations and distortions of the truth, specifically targeting women in politics. Its aim is twofold: on the one hand, to undermine the credibility and reputation of women politicians and, on the other, to reinforce the perception that politics is a corrupt, cynical and violent field, where only those willing to play dirty can survive. A documented example is the case of the Philippines with the “machismo populism”²¹ campaign, a strategy to weaken women politicians and discourage their active participation in politics. (Sequera, 2023)

20 TEDIC: Digital violence is real. Types of digital gender violence.
Available at: <https://violenciadigital.tedic.org/es/b/guia/tipos-de-violencia-de-genero-digital/>

21 The Atlantic. 2018. The Price of 'Machismo Populism' in the Philippines
<https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/06/duterte-kiss-philippines/562265/>

Network or coordinated harassment

Network harassment can be carried out by a single person, such as a former partner or an unknown online harasser; however, the Internet has provided spaces for individuals to organize and encourage large-scale coordinated attacks by groups of abusers. This type of abuse, referred to as “network harassment,” includes coordinated and organized attacks against specific individuals or issues, such as feminists or people posting about racial equality issues online. These attacks are often carried out by groups that share misogynistic and racist views and seek to reinforce patriarchal gender norms. Online harassment can include trolling, the coordination of false allegations on online platforms, as well as derogatory comments about women’s bodies or threats of rape. Groups also use private messaging sites to have misogynistic conversations and share abusive content. This type of harassment is increasing in several African countries and has especially affected women in leadership roles such as journalists, activists and politicians. In addition, with the growing popularity of Zoom during the COVID-19 pandemic, a new trend of online harassment known as Zoom-bombing has emerged, where individuals join online meetings to share racist, sexist, or pornographic content with the goal of disrupting the participants (Anderson, 2020).

Dissemination of private images without consent

This violence consists of the non-consensual distribution of intimate images by ex-partners (commonly known as “revenge porn”), a phenomenon that receives significant media attention and is at the center of discussions on how to regulate it. However, image-based sexual abuse encompasses a wide range of abusive behaviors and is perpetrated by a wide variety of people. The concept was developed by UK academics Claire McGlynn and Erika Rackley, who define it as private sexual images that have been created and/or distributed without the consent of the protagonist, as well as threats to create and distribute these images (Sequera, 2021). Among various forms of this type of violence are image-based sexual abuse, including non-consensual distribution of intimate images, voyeurism, sexual exploitation, extortion or sextortion, documentation or transmission of sexual violence, and non-consensual creation of synthetic sexual media, including sexual deepfakes. (CIGI, 2023)

Doxxing

One of the most dangerous forms of publishing private information is doxing. It involves disclosing personal data such as legal name, address, telephone number, place of work and private documents without the person’s consent. This practice is used to intimidate victims, provoking online harassment and generating fear of being stalked or physically harmed. Many women who speak out about gender inequality or are targeted by online misogynist groups have been victims of doxing. Once a person’s personal information becomes public, harassers may show up at their workplace, threaten them at home, or send harmful messages to their phone, email address, or social media accounts. Some doxed individuals had to change their phone numbers and email addresses, and in more drastic cases, move to new homes and change their legal name. (CIGI, 2023)

Stalking and monitoring

This type of violence can be carried out by monitoring a person's social media posts, tracking their location or installing commercial spyware on their devices. This usually involves unwanted surveillance, repeated communication or threatening behavior that may cause fear in the affected person. Abusive intimate partners often stalk their spouses, and reports show a gender difference in relation to online stalking, with women being more likely to be stalked and sexually harassed. Advanced technology, such as spyware, smart home devices, and drones, has also been used by abusers to monitor and control women. (CIGI, 2023)

Defamation and slander

These forms of violence can have a significant impact on a person's reputation. In many countries, such as Paraguay, defamation is legally defined as the publication of false information that damages someone's reputation. In the age of Google searches, a person's reputation can be easily altered if false information about them is published online. There is an entire industry dedicated to protecting people's online reputations and removing defamatory information from the Internet. Women are particularly vulnerable to defamatory statements about their sexuality because of patriarchal gender norms that restrict female sexuality. Online attacks against women and girls often focus on their sexuality and include false statements about it. It is important to note that both the publication of false information and the publication of true, but decontextualized information can be harmful. (CIGI, 2023)

Hate speech

Hate speech is a particularly abominable form of technology-facilitated gender-based violence that dehumanizes and promotes violence against a person or group based on identifying characteristics such as their religion, gender, ethnicity, disability, or other identity factors. Intersectional factors can increase a woman's likelihood of being targeted by digital hate speech, as in the case of Muslim women, who are more likely to be targets of online hate crimes than Muslim men. Hate speech has proliferated online, with white supremacist, Islamophobic, anti-Semitic, anti-LGBTQ+ and misogynist groups finding spaces to promote their discriminatory beliefs. Social media platforms have been criticized for profiting from these spaces and, in some cases, driving traffic to them through their algorithms. At times, online hate rhetoric has led to offline violence, as in India and Sri Lanka, where hateful messages against minority groups spread through Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and WhatsApp have led to violence directed against them. (CIGI, 2023)

Hate speech may target women due to a combination of their identity factors or, more specifically, their gender. This speech reinforces systemic inequalities, hinders the online participation of certain groups, and can lead to violence and even death. Hate speech is therefore prohibited under the Convention on Human Rights in Latin America (OAS) and is not a protected form of the right to freedom of speech. (RELE, 2004)

3.2. Speech protection threshold

Women in public office play a fundamental role in the realization of a full democracy. While it is important to recognize that there are forms of violence such as insults and unpleasant or uncomfortable messages that can also be considered as violence in the digital environment, the protection of speech is extended when the person holds public office or is a public figure and is exposed to public scrutiny.

The American Convention on Human Rights and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACHR) establish broad protection for freedom of speech, recognizing that States should not impose strict limits on this freedom. However, this protection is not absolute and requires that those who participate in public debates be willing to tolerate criticism and diverse opinions, even if the criticisms are addressed to them²². In the Herrera Ulloa case²³, the Inter-American Court established that in a democratic society, public officials are more exposed to criticism and public scrutiny because their activities are of public interest. Therefore, a higher threshold of tolerance for criticism is established when expressions are directed at public officials, individuals involved in public affairs or candidates for public office²⁴. This means that these individuals are subject to more intense public scrutiny, and that the State should not impose restrictions on the exercise of the right of freedom of speech in this context, unless the expressions are not protected. Such criticisms function as accountability mechanisms within a robust regime of public scrutiny, which is essential to keep the exercise of public power under control in a democratic society²⁵.

On the other hand, there is the concept of prior censorship. This refers to the restriction of information or expressions prior to their dissemination, a practice strictly prohibited under the Latin American human rights system. It is considered a serious violation of the right to freedom of speech at both the national²⁶ and international level. This means that no regulation can allow the application of prior censorship for cases of public interest. However, in the case of law 5777/16, its deficient implementation and interpretation by some Courts are opening the door to this possibility. (Sequera, 2024)

At the time of writing this research, two cases have been identified that challenge the boundaries of freedom of speech and gender-based digital violence. The first case concerns Senator Katty González, currently irregularly removed from the Senate²⁷. She reported a series of attacks and defamations directed at her and her team, allegedly driven by Congressman Rodrigo Gamarra. According to González, these attacks go beyond the usual political criticisms and focus on personal and professional aspects and she invokes law 5777/16 to request precautionary measures to stop the violence against her on social media²⁸.

22 IACHR, Case of Palamara Iribarne v. Chile. Sentence of November 22, 2005; IACHR, Case of Herrera Ulloa v. Costa Rica. Sentence of July 2, 2004.

23 IACHR. Arguments before the Inter-American Court in the case of Herrera Ulloa v. Costa Rica. Transcribed in: IACHR, Case of Herrera Ulloa v. Costa Rica. Sentence of July 2, 2004.

24 Even if they use humor through satire, parody, caricature, and pastiche, it is considered a form of protected speech because it can effectively disseminate information and allow individuals to express their ideas, as long as it does not constitute unprotected speech. (Kaye, 2015)

25 IACHR, Case of Kimel v. Argentina. Sentence of May 2, 2008; IACHR, Case of Palamara Iribarne v. Chile. Sentence of November 22, 2005; IACHR, Case of Ricardo Canese. Sentence of August 31, 2004.

26 Paraguayan legislation also explicitly prohibits prior censorship, emphasizing the importance of preserving full freedom of speech as a fundamental pillar for the democratic functioning of the country.

27 Paraguay: The irregular removal of Senator Katty González. February 2024. Available at: <https://www.celag.org/paraguay-la-destitucion-irregular-de-la-senadora-katty-gonzalez/>

28 Última Hora. Febrero 2024. Senator Katty González files a complaint against a Congressman for violence and requests protection. Available at: <https://www.ultimahora.com/senadora-katty-gonzalez-denuncia-a-diputado-por-violencia-y-pide-proteccion>

At the center of the debate is evidence that consists of comparing old and recent videos of the Senator, with the aim of examining the consistency of her speeches over time. However, it is relevant to note that this video has a parodic nature²⁹, which means that it does not constitute violence under law 5777/16. Rather than being considered direct attacks, they can be interpreted as forms of political satire. Therefore, to properly assess this situation, it is necessary to apply a broad approach that considers factors such as the legality and proportionality of the proposed measures, analyzing the video from the perspective of speeches against public officials and their threshold of protection under the current law.

In another similar case, Senator Norma Aquino, also known as Yami Nal, has requested precautionary measures to delete a social media post made by journalist Letizia Medina, based on Law 5777/16³⁰. This incident arises after a video was shared on the account of ABC FM 98.5, where journalist Letizia Medina parodies the senator using a pig filter on her face and an audio that suggests a mockery about the expulsion of Katty González from the Senate. Following the media coverage of the journalist's censorship, the Court handling the case decided not to grant the request for precautionary measures for exceeding the legal limits of freedom of speech in the political context³¹.

As can be observed, the precautionary measures of law 5777/16³² applied to delete or prohibit the publication of content against individuals holding public office are considered prior censorship under both international and national law. The response to this type of digital violence should be addressed in another jurisdiction, which is the Civil Court³³. (Sequera, 2024)

3.3. Liability of intermediaries

The responsibility of Internet intermediaries and providers in relation to gender-based violence in the digital environment is an important topic in the debate on Internet safety and the protection of human rights, especially regarding gender-based violence. Intermediaries, such as social media, messaging services and online platforms play an important role in facilitating and regulating the content shared on their platforms.

Among the variety of platforms, one can find, for example: social media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter (X), Tik Tok, Snapchat), email services, instant messaging applications (Whatsapp, Signal, Telegram or Messenger), dating applications (Tinder, Bumble, Grindr, Hinge, [Match.com](#)) online video games, sites where content is exchanged (Reddit), online discussion forums, the comments sections of newspapers, or in user-generated platforms (wikis, blogs, image and video sharing sites), among others.

On the other hand, Internet providers generally focus their responsibility on providing secure Internet access and protecting users' privacy. However, they may also be involved in the regulation of online content if they participate in the management of platforms or services that host such content. Among them are: Claro América, Tigo (Millicom), Telefónica, ANTEL among others.

29 Twitter (X) post by Deputy Rodrigo Gamarra. January 2024.

Video available at: <https://twitter.com/rodrigamarra/status/1751078980763967615>

30 ABC. February 2024. Attempted censorship by Yami Nal: Judge refrains herself due to the Senator's lawyer's history of violence.

Available at: <https://www.abc.com.py/nacionales/2024/02/21/intento-de-censura-de-yami-nal-jueza-se-inhibe-por-antecedente-de-violencia-de-abogado-de-la-legisladora/>

31 ABC. March 2024. Protected form of expression: Judge dismisses Yami Nal's complaint against Leti Medina.

Available at: <https://www.abc.com.py/politica/2024/03/11/forma-de-expresion-protegida-juez-rechaza-denuncia-de-yami-nal-contra-leti-medina/>

32 Última Hora. February 2024. Warns about the misuse of Law 5777 to censor communicators.

Available at: <https://www.ultimahora.com/advierten-sobre-mala-utilizacion-de-ley-5777-para-censurar-a-comunicadores>

33 Inter-American Court of Human Rights, Case of Ricardo Canese. Sentence of August 31, 2004.

When addressing the debate on technology-facilitated gender-based violence against women politicians, it is crucial to highlight the fundamental role that digital platforms have played in incorporating this issue into academic and civil society debates in recent years. In this context, society has witnessed how social media has established mechanisms to regulate content considered as “digital violence” “hate speech” and “digital harassment”.

When it came to addressing gender-based political violence reported by feminist activists, these platforms showed little action. However, in response to scandals such as Cambridge Analytica and the increasing spread of disinformation -perceived as serious threats to democracy and facilitated by the same Internet platforms- the debate on content moderation has reached a higher level of priority. This is evident both for public authorities and for the teams in charge of regulations and security in large technology companies. (AL SUR, 2021)

MonitorA research by InternetLab , in the Brazilian electoral context, highlights the collaboration initiatives between platforms and electoral authorities. The research emphasizes the importance of questioning to what extent these regulations have been effective in observing and monitoring the phenomenon of political and electoral violence, which is mostly directed towards socially marginalized groups.

For example, terms such as hate speech, insults, offenses and attacks in electoral contexts are general terms frequently used to describe these phenomena in policies or legislations but they lack clear equivalents in terms of use of digital platforms. (Internetlab, 2022)

3.4. Types of perpetrators and motivations

To define the types of aggressors, the authors based their work on the research conducted by TEDIC on digital violence against women journalists in Paraguay (Sequera & Acuña, 2023). The design of the list was specifically based on ABRAJI’s proposal on violence to women journalists³⁴ and on UN WOMEN’s identifications on violence to women politicians. (UN Women, 2021) The following list is not exhaustive but reflects the greatest variety of types of aggressors or perpetrators of violence against women and diversities who hold public office³⁵.

State Authorities

Mostly, public officials in positions of power are the ones who perpetrate digital violence against women politicians. This includes digital harassment, such as sending messages outside working hours or without consent. A documented example is the research on workplace violence and harassment in the Senate of Paraguay. This research shows the way power is exercised over women who work in these spaces, whether they are politicians or high and low-ranking officials³⁶.

34 <https://abraj.org.br/>

35 This list excludes family or domestic violence and focuses strictly on workplace-related relations.

36 ParlAmericas. 2021. Senator Filizzola presented to the plenary session of Paraguay’s Senate the results of a survey on workplace violence conducted with ParlAmericas in the country. Available at: <https://parlAmericas.org/new/el-senador-carlos-filizzola-presento-ante-el-pleno-de-la-honorable-camara-de-senadores-de-paraguay-los-resultados-de-una-encuesta-sobre-violencia-laboral-realizada-con-parlAmericas/?lang=es>

Media

The media can also reproduce violence against women politicians and can be considered as perpetrators. For example, some media messages directly harm women politicians' chances at the polls. Discussions about their appearance or their families are two areas that trigger particularly unequal responses between male and female candidates. An illustrative example of this is the media response to Finnish Prime Minister Sanna Marin's style in a 2020 photo shoot. In that response, her appearance was highlighted more than her political abilities. This type of media treatment is not an isolated case; politicians such as Nicola Sturgeon and Theresa May of the UK also experienced similar treatment in 2017, reflecting how the media can negatively influence the perception and treatment of women in politics³⁷.

Religious leaders

In the context of online political violence, religious leaders can use their platforms to spread messages of hate, intolerance or exclusion directed towards certain groups, including women politicians. An example of violence in the digital environment coming from this group is the case of an evangelist leader in Brazil called Jackson Villar, who promotes hate speech on Telegram and against rights in the name of Jesus Christ³⁸.

Union leaders

Union perpetrators, by having an organizational structure and often a clear political agency, can use their resources and networks to perpetrate and perpetuate violence. Among the documented ones are coordinated campaigns on social media to spread misogynistic messages or disinformation about women candidates and political leaders, impacting their reputation and ability to exercise politics. (UN Women, 2021)

Political parties

Political parties are organizations that represent certain political interests and seek to obtain and maintain political power. However, they can also be spaces for the reproduction of political violence against women politicians or candidates in a variety of ways. This can include sexist or misogynistic comments by prominent party members, the spread of rumors and defamations aimed at damaging the reputation of women politicians, and discrimination within the party itself that can hinder women's advancement into leadership positions. (UN Women, 2021)

37 The Conversation. January 2024. How Media Attention Harms Female Political Candidates. Available at: <https://theconversation.com/como-perjudica-la-atencion-mediatica-a-las-candidatas-politicas-221771>

38 Agencia Pública. 2022. "Matar e quebrar urnas": evangélico líder de motociata incentiva crimes no Telegram. Available at: <https://apublica.org/sentinela/2022/10/matar-e-quebrar-urnas-evangelico-lider-de-motociata-incentiva-crimes-no-telegram/>

Political opponents

Political opponents are individuals, groups or parties that oppose the policies or actions of a government or ruling party. As perpetrators of violence against women politicians or candidates, political opponents may employ tactics similar to those of the ruling parties. This may include personal attacks such as sexist comments, defamations and rumors aimed at damaging the reputation of women politicians. A clear example is during plenary sessions of the Paraguayan Congress, where Congressman Basilio Núñez makes violent remarks against Congresswomen who don't share his party's views and disagree with him on political issues³⁹.

Intelligence Services

In Latin America there are several documented cases of communication surveillance through the illegitimate and illegal use of surveillance systems by State intelligence services. The most recent case is the use of the Pegasus software of the NSO Group of Israel, documented by Amnesty International. The report revealed that 180 journalists in 20 countries had their phones infected, as well as activists and political opponents, including women politicians⁴⁰.

Members of the Armed Forces - Military

The militarization of public security is a constant threat to the respect and guarantee of women's human rights. In countries like Mexico, there is a high level of harassment and surveillance by the military against political opponents, activists and politicized women. In addition to cyber patrols and online surveillance, these perpetrators also harass, criminalize and even attack the integrity of women's lives⁴¹. Paraguay is not distant from this reality, in 2016 TEDIC documented a case of communication surveillance of a journalist from ABC media, who reported cases of corruption of the Paraguayan military leadership⁴².

Police and security

Police forces can pose threats to women politicians and those who hold political office. Various forms of digital violence can come from this group of people. A documented example of such violence is the surveillance and then assassination of Brazilian councilwoman Marielle Franco. In 2024, it was published that the intellectual authors were police chiefs in Rio de Janeiro⁴³.

39 ABC. 2023. Female legislators complaint about the verbal violence faced by women in politics. <https://www.abc.com.py/politica/2023/03/08/diputadas-lamentan-violencia-verbal-que-sufren-las-mujeres-que-activan-en-la-politica/>

40 Amnesty International. 2022. Pegasus: The mass surveillance scandal. <https://www.es.amnesty.org/en-que-estamos/blog/historia/articulo/pegasus-espionaje-masivo/>

41 Equis Justicia para las mujeres. 2023. Gender-Based Violence with Firearms in Mexico. Available at: <https://equis.org.mx/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Gender-Based-Violence.pdf>

42 TEDIC. 2016. Espionage of journalist confirms that the State illegally intercepts communications. <https://www.tedic.org/espionaje-a-periodista-confirma-que-el-estado-intercepta-comunicaciones-ilegalmente/>

43 El Pais. 2024. Anatomy of Marielle Franco's murder: the plan, the execution, false leads, and a sabotaged investigation. <https://elpais.com/america/2024-03-31/anatomia-del-asesinato-de-marielle-franco-el-plan-la-ejecucion-pistas-falsas-y-una-investigacion-saboteada.html>

Colleagues and coworkers

Perpetrators of workplace violence engage in mobbing, discrediting through satire, memes and systematic bullying to undermine their authority and silence the voices of women in management or political positions. The ILO and UN Women have documented cases of digital violence in the workplace. Such documentation has identified that workplace violence predominantly comes from male colleagues⁴⁴.

Profiles of anti-rights and protesters

It is not surprising that misogynist groups organize themselves into a transnational movement on the Internet to coordinate attacks against women and non-binary people. In addition to misogyny and racism, another common aspect among these groups is their technical skills, i.e., they have a solid knowledge of technologies. Therefore, it is common for manifestations of gender-based political violence to come from extreme right-wing groups that skillfully take advantage of the gaps in the development of social media, and even the very logic of their algorithms, to spread hate and disinformation. (AL SUR, 2021)

Social media platforms that moderate content

These social media strategies, tactics and narratives have gained strength by operating on platforms that function according to the principles of Zuboff's Surveillance Capitalism. This system not only exposes personal data to possible abuses such as doxxing but also favors the creation of algorithms that reward hate and disinformation content, as it generates more clicks, which in turn leads to higher profits. (AL SUR, 2021)

In this context, there are also automated blocking and censorship by social media to speeches that contain intellectual property content and are considered copyright violation. The case of the digital media outlet Latitud25 was documented by TEDIC for publishing information of public interest with memes that were reported for copyright infringement, and the platform decided to block the media outlet's account⁴⁵.

Anonymous profiles

They refer to unknown online profiles that hide the real identity of the person using them. These profiles are created without revealing identifiable personal information, such as real name, address, phone number, etc. Instead, users may choose to use pseudonyms, nicknames or simply remain completely anonymous.

These profiles are protected by the right to freedom of speech⁴⁶. However, this does not justify unlawful attacks or actions.

44 ILO and UN Women: It's time to put an end to workplace violence and harassment in Latin America and the Caribbean. <https://lac.unwomen.org/es/noticias-y-eventos/articulos/2021/06/oit-y-onu-mujeres-es-hora-de-decir-basta-a-la-violencia>

45 TEDIC. 2019. The absence of balance between copyright and freedom of speech on Twitter. <https://www.tedic.org/la-ausencia-de-balance-entre-derecho-de-autor-y-libertad-de-expresion-en-twitter/>

46 Derechos Digitales. 2016. Vladimir Garay. Why we need anonymity and why it is important to defend it. <https://www.derechosdigitales.org/10211/para-que-necesitamos-anonimato-y-por-que-es-importante-defenderlo/>

Coordinated groups of Trolls, troll farms and bots

Trolls are defined as accounts that engage in online activities intended to cause harm, intimidation, or generate discord through digital platforms and social media. These groups, often organized and coordinated, employ tactics such as spreading disinformation, online harassment, cyberbullying, manipulation of opinions, and propagation of hate messages.

An example that can fit this classification is the coordinated attacks against journalist Mercedes Barriocanal on her personal phone with hate speech⁴⁷.

Troll farms are of particular concern, as they can be backed by organizations with specific agendas, such as governments, political parties or interest groups, giving them the resources and capabilities to carry out large-scale disinformation and manipulation campaigns. A documented example is the case of the attack in defense of the military dictatorship against the grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina⁴⁸.

Bots are automated anonymous accounts that are used to replicate content and get attention on social media to impact the visibility of the content.

An example that illustrates the concepts mentioned above is the case of the 2020 U.S. presidential primaries. A 2019 Marvelous AI study employing data analytics concluded that accounts considered to have low credibility, including bots and trolls, directed more attacks toward female candidates in the U.S. Democratic presidential primaries than toward their male counterparts. This finding underscores the persistent gender disparity in politics and highlights the need to address political violence directed specifically at women in the electoral arena⁴⁹.

Organized crime groups, drug traffickers, guerrillas and paramilitaries

They are perpetrators of particular concern due to their ability to operate outside the boundaries of the rule of law and their willingness to use extreme violence as a means to achieve their goals. Documentations of violence by this type of perpetrators are generally femicides, however, the initial stage of contact with their victims is through surveillance of their communication, online harassment, doxing and other forms of digital violence⁵⁰.

Justice

When it is said that the judicial system is a perpetrator of violence, it refers to cases in which judicial institutions, instead of protecting rights and ensuring justice, become instruments of oppression and abuse of power. In many cases, this manifests in the minimization and dismissal of digital violence in Courts. There are many cases documented by Latin American civil society, such as those of non-consensual dissemination of intimate images⁵¹.

47 TEDIC. 2023. Araceli Ramirez. Disinformation and Digital Violence: the case of Menchi Barriocanal. <https://www.tedic.org/desinformacion-y-violencia-digital-el-caso-de-menchi-barriocanal/>

48 Página 12. 2024. A digital attack against a human rights-focused publisher. <https://www.pagina12.com.ar/722285-un-atentado-digital-contra-una-editorial-especializada-en-de>

49 The Conversation. 2023. Being a female politician and facing constant sexist attacks online. <https://theconversation.com/ser-mujer-politica-y-recibir-constantemente-ataques-machistas-en-la-red-203816>

50 Iniciativa Spotlight. 2021. Violence against women and girls in contexts of organized crime. https://oig.cepal.org/sites/default/files/e3_informe_final_ccrev_07082022.pdf

51 CIGI. 2021. Non-Consensual Intimate Image Distribution: The legal landscape in Kenya, Chile and South Africa. <https://www.cigionline.org/publications/non-consensual-intimate-image-distribution-the-legal-landscape-in-kenya-chile-and-south-africa/>

Companies and businessmen

This type of perpetrator of violence is the least documented in the region. The Brazilian agency Abraji documented very isolated cases of digital violence exercised by companies and businessmen against journalists in Brazil⁵². In 2021, a case was documented in Uganda where Internet access was blocked during elections, affecting the connectivity of candidates⁵³.

3.5. Protection measures against digital threats

Paraguay has third generation laws that address gender-based violence. These laws build on the first and second generation laws, which focused primarily on domestic violence, to include other forms of violence and sanctions. In the second decade of the 21st century in Latin America, these types of regulations have expanded to include State responsibility for the prevention, care and eradication of gender-based violence, as well as the criminalization of femicide. However, not all of these laws address digital or technology-facilitated violence, as these categories are more recent. Paraguay mentions this form of violence in its specific legislation such as Law 5777/16, while other types of violence are defined in the Penal Code.

Similarly, victims of technology-facilitated violence continue to have limited resources or access to justice, as evidenced by many researches similar to this one that highlight the profound consequences of violence in the digital environment. For example, these acts can result in physical, psychological, emotional, behavioral, and economic harm. In many cases, victims live in a culture of silence due to their reluctance to report incidents: some fear for their safety if they speak out or worry about being blamed for the violence they have experienced. In addition, it is known that some authorities may not apply available laws, mainly due to lack of knowledge about relevant legislation concerning technology, domestic violence and, in some cases, jurisdictional challenges. (CIGI, 2023)

In some countries, filing complaints with UN Rapporteurs and Commissions, as well as with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR/OAS), can be an effective strategy for exerting political pressure, seeking responses and documenting cases of technology-facilitated gender-based violence. This approach mobilizes diverse civil society entities, sometimes even transnationally, and strengthens regional ties and mechanisms.

The visibility of the narratives contained in these complaints can generate tools for understanding and addressing the problem from a regional perspective. For example, the case of Brazilian parliamentarian Talíria Petrone, one of 13 black female parliamentarians in a Chamber of 513 Deputies, illustrates this point. During the far-right government of Jair Bolsonaro and following the murder of Marielle Franco, her colleague in the Chamber of Councilors, Petrone experienced an increase in death threats. In 2020, at least five phone calls plotting her murder were intercepted. The drafting of a letter of complaint addressed to three UN rapporteurs highlighted the lack of State protection in a context where threats to a government representative are a threat to democracy itself. This letter proved to be a valuable resource for political articulation, demanding an end to the violence and promoting international debate on the creation of a legal and political framework to protect the women legislators. (AL SUR, 2021)

52 Abriji. 2021. Gender-based violence against journalists. https://abraji-bucket-001.s3.sa-east-1.amazonaws.com/uploads/publication_info/details_file/6d9284bd-4003-4603-a570-d837d339f2c4/Relat_rio_Viol_ncia_de_g_nero_contra_jornalistas_ES.pdf

53 Pillicy. 2021. Amplified Abuse: Report on Online Violence Against Women in the 2021 Uganda General Election. <https://archive.pillicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Amplified-Abuse-Report.pdf>

On the other hand, if the aggressor of online harassment is identified as a public official, it is suggested to carry out administrative summaries rather than merely censoring the speech without a prior analysis of the tripartite test to assess whether it is a speech protected by freedom of speech or not. A notable example is the case of Yamil Esgaib, a congressman from the Honor Colorado movement, whose controversial behavior in October 2023 sparked public concern and debate. In particular, his threats of physical aggression against Senator Celeste Amarilla and the harassment directed at Congresswoman Johanna Ortega and Rocio Vallejos have generated outrage. This situation led Congress to suspend the congressman for 30 days without pay⁵⁴. These incidents, publicly reported by the affected congresswomen reveal a worrying pattern of violence and harassment towards women in politics. This measure has inhibited the aggressor from continuing the violence against the congresswomen to date.

3.6. Reparations to TFGBV victims

According to the standards of the Inter-American System for the Protection of Human Rights (ISHR), reparation not only seeks to restore the rights of victims, but also has a transformative purpose by addressing and combating the structural roots of violence, marginalization and gender discrimination that may have caused the victimizing acts⁵⁵.

In the case of online violence, damage repair measures should be conceived from a broad perspective that prioritizes the victims' needs. These measures may include financial compensation to cover the costs of material and immaterial damages in order to help restore victims as much as possible and rebuild their lives in the short, medium and long term. In addition, it is crucial to provide medical and psychological care to victims during and after the legal process, as well as to implement mechanisms to immediately remove harmful content from Internet platforms, especially in cases of non-consensual distribution of intimate images. Quick action should also be taken to prevent the publication of such content and, when necessary, to block the profiles of aggressors.

In terms of guarantees of non-repetition, it is essential to strengthen the regulatory framework to address online gender-based violence, establish protocols for investigation and attention to victims with a gender perspective, and train and sensitize public officials on the characteristics of technology-facilitated gender-based violence. Additionally, protection measures should be implemented to prevent retaliation against victims. As for satisfaction measures, these may include the implementation of campaigns to prevent digital violence and issuing public apologies by those responsible. (UN Women, 2022)

54 Ultima Hora. 2023. Yamil Esgaib: the controversial colorado Deputy who likes to threaten. Available at: <https://www.ultimahora.com/yamil-esgaib-el-polemico-diputado-colorado-que-le-gusta-amenazar>

55 Inter-American Court of Human Rights, Case of González and Others ("Campo Algodonero") v. Mexico. Sentence of January 19, 2009.

4. INTERVIEWS WITH WOMEN POLITICIANS

The intersectional perspective recognizes that individual experiences are shaped by an intersection of different identities and social markers, such as gender, race, social class, sexual orientation, among others. In this context, the authors conducted an online monitoring of candidates with diverse profiles, recognizing the importance of considering how gender is intertwined with other aspects of identity.

The objective was to observe how different manifestations of femininity and masculinity were expressed in online political discourses during elections. This included analyzing how these discourses can be used to attack, blackmail or exert psychological violence against political subjects.

Regarding the selection process, it is mentioned that initially, studies and activism related to the situation of women in society often adopted a universalized view of the category “woman”, without considering the diverse experiences that exist within this category. This implied that certain aspects of women’s experiences, such as race, social class or sexual orientation, could be relegated or ignored in traditional analyses and approaches.

It highlights the importance of considering the multiple dimensions of a person’s identity and how these interact with each other to influence their experience in society. Gender scholars such as Kimberlé Crenshaw, Patrícia Hill Collins, bell hooks, Lélia Gonzalez, Sueli Carneiro and Anne McClintock have advocated for an intersectional perspective, which recognizes that factors such as race, gender, social class and other markers of difference cannot be separated from one another, but rather intertwine to shape individual experiences and social positions.

In-depth interviews and focus groups are adjustments of the tools used in previous TEDIC researches⁵⁶.

4.1. Methodology

As a methodological approach, qualitative methods were chosen for their contribution to understanding and describing in depth and in detail the phenomenon studied. In order to get different perspectives on the subject, data collection tools were applied such as semi-structured interviews and focus groups. A rigorous selection of key informants was made, taking into account the political background of the women and their territorial representation.

Specifically, women politicians from the Executive, Judicial and Legislative Branches were invited to participate. For the latter group, national Senators and departmental Councilwomen from different political parties were selected. In the development of the research, the contributions of the key informants are presented, taking into account the principle of anonymity. This approach is intended to protect the privacy of the participants, encourage their honest participation, minimize possible risks for them and comply with the ethical standards of the research⁵⁷. The coding created for each of the participants is presented below:

56 Link of researches: <https://www.tedic.org/violencia-de-genero-en-internet-en-paraguay/> y <https://www.tedic.org/la-violencia-digital-de-genero-a-periodistas-en-paraguay/>

57 To apply the research tools, an informed consent document was provided to each participant.

TABLE 1. Coding of key participants.

#	Reference of women politician	Code
1	National Senator	SNP-01
2	National Senator	SNP-02
3	National Senator	SNP-03
4	Minister of the Executive Branch	ME-01
5	High ranking official of the Judicial Branch	MP-01
6	Departmental Councilwoman of Central	CDCE-01
7	Departmental Councilwoman of Central	CDCE-02
8	Departmental Councilwoman of Central	CDCE-03
9	Departmental Councilwoman of Central	CDCE-04
10	Departmental Councilwoman of Central	CDCE-05
11	Departmental Councilwoman of Central	CDCE-06
12	Departmental Councilwoman of Central	CDCE-07
13	Departmental Councilwoman of Central	CDCE-08
14	Departmental Councilwoman of Central	CDCE-09
15	Departmental Councilwoman of Central	CDCE-010
16	Departmental Councilwoman of Cordillera	CDCO-01
17	Departmental Councilwoman of Cordillera	CDCO-02
18	Departmental Councilwoman of Cordillera	CDCO-03
19	Departmental Councilwoman of Cordillera	CDCO-04
20	Departmental Councilwoman of Cordillera	CDCO-05

The application of the methodological tools was carried out between April and May 2024, followed by the systematization and analysis of the information provided by each of the women politicians participating in the research.

As for the analysis of the information collected, data analysis and classification categories were used to identify recurrences, similarities and differences in perceptions and attitudes, both in the individual interviews and in the group conversations.

In the development of the work, both individual and group perspectives are presented in order to preserve the voice of the participating women politicians, the authenticity of the story, the illustration of context patterns and enrich the data contribution.

Based on the findings, there is evidence regarding the current state of technology-facilitated gender-based violence against women politicians in Paraguay. It is hoped that this information will be taken into account to improve public policies in the country.

4.2. Research development

Ecosystems of violence. Women politicians and technology

Structural violence against women is present in various social, economic, political and cultural dimensions of society. It manifests itself in norms, policies and practices that complicate the role of being a woman, and even more so for those who pursue a political career. The findings of this research show that the relationship between violence and technology adds to, expands, intensifies and, above all, complicates the types of violence.

In this sense, concerning the political field and women, they can be seen both as protagonists occupying spaces of power (Executive, Legislative and Judicial) and also as subjects in the gender gap. In the group and individual interviews, women politicians reported that they operate in a hostile political environment with situations of violence and aggression. They expressed that they deal with violent behavior of all kinds, stating:

“We have been continuously subjected to abuse and harassment. I had several very, very difficult situations where specifically the political sector with hegemony created certain ecosystems of violence that were rather distracting and were ultimately messages of intimidation” (SNP-03).

These ecosystems of violence are fueled by various forms of attack, ranging from neighborhood-level issues to media level, they attack with situations of jealousy, sexuality, appearance, clothing, association with acts of corruption, among other factors.

The women consulted expressed that in their political careers, campaigning and gaining access to a seat or position has cost “a lot of effort and sacrifice” and that staying in these positions “costs twice as much” (CDCO-01). They indicated that they have personal and professional roles that are not equal to those of their male colleagues. In addition, they constantly have to face gender stereotypes.

Technology plays a transversal and ambivalent role in the exercise of women politicians’ activities. They mentioned that “today it is impossible to carry out any action without using technology” (CDCE-07), since it is present and intersects with all dimensions of political work. On the other hand, technology is perceived and valued as a positive tool as well as a negative one. They pointed out that its value depends on whether it is used to promote rights, empowerment and/or well-being of people, as well as whether it is used to discriminate, inflict violence or amplify aggressions.

They pointed out that politics “is not kind to women” (CDCE-02) since structural gender violence is heavy and loaded with intersectional characteristics, since the degree of violence is aggravated by the addition of factors such as indigenous status, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, among others.

The women commented that entering the political arena implies entering a space where there is hostility, exposure and permanent changes in scenarios due to the competition among actors who want power. These actors are mostly men in Paraguayan politics.

Politics has historically been dominated by men to the detriment of women. They mentioned that even though some norms have changed, traditional sexist practices are still very present in the culture, intensifying and becoming more visible with the use of technology. This situation makes it hostile for women to enter and remain in politics. As one voice expressed: “...the political sphere is not very kind to women. I always say that we have to work twice or three times as hard as men” (CDCE-03).

The women politicians indicate that they face stereotypes or labels related to being women, they coincide that they are perceived “as not being good for politics” (CDCE-05). The types of digital violence against women and their low representation in political spaces show that gender inequality persists. Socio-cultural, economic and political spaces have discriminatory attitudes, creating barriers to equal opportunities based on the experiences narrated by the women.

They pointed out that being a woman politician is to be exposed and pressured by the “clichés” characteristic of the current system, which are intensified by technological irruption. They said, “You are pressured about your age, your appearance, your success, your sexuality, and your own management” (SNP-02). A shared concern is the emergence of a prototype of a modern female politician, which, as many reflected, is often not representative. One of the voices detailed: “For me, in addition to digital violence, I’m worried about the type of violence that makes women feel more and more pressured to be a certain model of woman” (MPJ-1).

Another concern is related to the impotence in the face of what they consider to be violence without limits, since digital violence, in their words “is out of control”, representing a significant problem for society. Aggressions in social media are fierce and lack effective restrictions regarding account blocking. Additionally, in Paraguay, the situation is complicated by the failure of platforms to detect aggressions when they are written in Guaraní. They expressed: “we receive all kinds of aggressive comments in social media, but when they are written in Guaraní, the platforms don’t detect it, so the accounts are not blocked and nothing happens” (CDCO-05).

In view of this situation, they are concerned about the possible consequences in the short term: 1. The abandonment of women’s political careers and 2. Impacts on the mental health of the general population. Some of them said:

We are attacked for everything... this is going to make us lose the will to continue in politics. Some people see this and think, why should I get into politics? (CDCO-01).

And for me it is a circuit of attacks, like everyone attacks you and then we only have one type of language, which is attack or violence... this not only affects those of us in public offices, but everyone in society, because we contaminate our environment by listening to all kinds of aggressive things (CDCO06).

They warned that if regulatory mechanisms or educational campaigns are not created, there will continue to be cases of harassment, stress, anxiety, depression and even, in some cases, that constant aggressive attack can lead to suicide that could be prevented. One of them said:

There are cases of suicide because of what is said all the time on social media, not only in politics but in real life, people who make the drastic decision to end their lives because of malicious comments made on social media about them, so we need tools to deal with this (CDCE-07).

They stated that measures are needed to eradicate this situation and to contribute to digital security and protection policies for women politicians and all citizens.

Engaging in politics has its cost, and for women it costs even more. The women politicians interviewed agree that their political career entails a lot of sacrifice and work, and also implies developing a special emotional and psychological strength due to the aggressions that women receive.

It may seem unheard of, but in Paraguay, the violence ecosystem incorporates aggressive actions related to superstition, generating a certain impunity because there are no immediate sanctions, but the aggressive experiences remain. One of the interviewees exemplified the intimidation she suffered when she obtained a seat in the Congress:

(...) on the first day I entered my office, –and I have documented this in a public deed–, I was received with a macumba⁵⁸. But literally, in my office there was a macumba. It was a dead chicken... and I never mentioned this because I repeat, what they want is to permanently submit you to their agenda (SNP-03).

Thus, to undermine women in their political roles, the patriarchal, hegemonic political system, with specific agendas, uses everything within its reach: social media, anonymous messages, phone calls and even actions that have to do with superstitious beliefs that have an impact on local culture.

The following testimonials illustrate the perceptions associated with this ecosystem of violence and facilitated through technology:

(...) I see that when they relate women with politics, everything becomes sexual, if you got to a high position, whether private, or whatever, it is because of a man... those things are shared in the groups (CDCE-01).

When you get into politics, people immediately label you as corrupt. You take office and they already say “oh, she must have gotten something” because they spread rumors in social media and they repeat and repeat and repeat and people start believing it’s not true (CDCO-03).

(...) even my neighbor attacked me. Because I didn’t have a car, so when someone came to pick me up, they said that he was my macho. And then one of my neighbors, when I left my house, saw my husband and went to tell him “that’s her guy now, because you allow her to do that (laughs)”. And so between jokes they send each other messages or audios to tell each other these things and they start attacking you (CDCO-03).

In my own party, in all the WhatsApp groups, they said that I was there because I was involved with a man with power. Rumors started, saying that I was sleeping with men, and that was a mechanism to turn me off (CDCE-09).

Yes. That is a problem with our male colleagues because sometimes their wives are jealous of us... they take pictures of you and send them to their wives (CDCE-08).

The issue of clothing is also another point. With men it doesn’t matter if they’re wearing a suit or just pants and a shirt... it’s the same, they are listened to for what they are and nobody is looking at their outfit. But for us, it’s all about how our hair looks, or whether our nails and clothes are in order. This becomes another issue. We’re not judged solely on our capabilities; they also focus on our appearance, how we’re dressed, and they even tell us “You really need a stylist.” Everything must be perfect for the photo and for social media (CDCE-08).

Machismo is everywhere... unfortunately, some women are also part of it... either because they keep quiet and don’t defend you when they see you are being attacked or because they also say

58 Klein (2006) defines “macumba” as esoteric practices carried out by some individuals as part of a cult dedicated to a particular deity, including Santería, black magic, or aimed at spirit possession. The purpose of these practices is often to cause a specific event to occur concerning someone or something. In English, “macumba” may be referred to as “voodoo” or “black magic.”

things (CDCE-01).

Women recognize that they have to deal with many roles in their lives, but despite this, some strongly emphasized that one of the challenges to improve political quality in general is that “time spent on politics should not be residual but of quality” (SNP-03).

In particular, they indicated that this not only refers to women who must fulfill the roles of wives, mothers or others, but also affects men, who, according to them, spend more time doing business than doing quality politics for the people.

Another of the current challenges, without a doubt, remains staying in the spaces conquered in all instances, whether private or public. They said:

(...) the challenge is to remain in the administrative structure, to remain in the relevant Commissions, to enter and remain in the elections, to achieve the presence of women in the decision-making tables, and the presence of women in the election technical teams (SNP-03).

Contrary to feeling overwhelmed by the effort to access and remain in politics, they said that:

It was never easy, but we are not discouraged by this, on the contrary, we have to encourage other women to make the same decision and to know that it is possible (CDCE-07).

4.3. Internet access and use

Technological irruption

The women reported that they experienced particular situations subject to the time and space in which they lived and which generally coincide with what happened to other people in the world. The advent of the Internet had a profound impact, and they highlighted the current technological dependence in politics. Social media and instant messaging are key tools to show and disseminate activities, ideas, statements and political projects in general. They pointed out that “social media platforms serve to greatly amplify the language, the message and the political project” (SNP-03).

Some women politicians who were born before the technological and Internet boom mentioned that it was surprising for them to experience the technological irruption, the sensation of shortening distance and the acceptance that there are no excuses for communicating today. Some also admitted to having a deficit in their Internet skills and rely heavily on the help of family members or close collaborators. Some shared the following:

Internet really revolutionized everything... it makes it possible to contact people directly, spontaneously and I am telling you this because I traveled abroad. When I was studying abroad, I used to send letters to my mother and they would arrive in a month, if they arrived at all. The way to communicate was by public phone on weekends and today you can make a video call, there is no limit in the world for connecting, is incredible (SNP-01).

(...) I'm from the era of beepers and huge cell phones that were called bricks (MPE-01).

(...) I remember when satellite phones first came out, but they were only accessible to wealthy people (MPJ-01).

(...) my mother was in Spain, so we had to go to the famous “cyberstore” to connect with her by video call (CDCE-10).

Without Internet we can’t do anything” (CDCO-01).

Some recall that their first contact with technology was training in the use of the D-O-S program, learning computerized typing, and that their first social media was Orkut. They also mentioned that, back then, the role of Community Manager (CM) did not exist. Looking back, it can be said that the Internet has even changed job offers; for example, nowadays, having a CM is crucial for engaging in politics.

They said that they first connected to the Internet for family reasons, as a relative or themselves were living abroad. On the other hand, they mentioned that it was a necessity or work requirement, since some of them had to work in coordination with firms that had headquarters or relationships in other countries. In this regard, they mentioned: “...we had to communicate with my bosses who lived in Argentina, so we used Blackberry and we had messenger with a PIN or something like that, it was a modernity of the time” (SNP-02).

Women politicians and social media

Currently, all women politicians say they have social media and use them differently depending on what they want to communicate. The type of platform differs according to age range and trajectory. Most of them coincide in using Facebook as the first common platform, followed by Instagram in second place and, in third place, being less used, they referred to the X platform⁵⁹.

The way they use social media varies depending on the communicational intention. For “serious” matters, “controversial” topics, or “hot issues,” they use X, hoping to gain media attention and think that this platform is mainly for journalists. While Facebook is used for more general topics and to make a summary or report of activities. On the other hand, Instagram is used with the intention of positioning images and to maintain close family ties or friendship.

In terms of their public or private nature, some mentioned that they have an account on a certain platform in a personal or private way to “keep who I am and stay in touch with old friends” while they open another public or “official” account on the same platform to interact massively and indistinctly with people.

Sometimes, some women politicians synchronize their platforms and replicate the publication in Facebook and Instagram according to the type of information, and use X mostly to disseminate informative issues. Exceptionally, some women politicians use TikTok, saying that it’s the language of young people and it’s more fun than other social media. Specifically, some interviewees use social media to post weekly updates of their management.

59 Former Twitter.

The instant messaging network that everyone uses on a daily basis is WhatsApp. To a lesser extent, some use LinkedIn as a platform that seems serious to them, but they categorize it as being exclusively for professional purposes and generally for the private world and civil society.

Only women politicians with seats at national level or with top-level positions have a CM; others prefer to manage their own accounts because, on the one hand, it implies an extra economic cost for them and, on the other hand, they want to be close to their public. Those who have used a CM previously managed their accounts “informally,” with team members helping sometimes. They mentioned that there were no criteria for types of images, quality of editing, or which copy to use, thus, they mentioned: “some people from my team helped me... one would take the photo, pass it to me and I would upload it, but they did not tell me ‘use this photo’” (SNP-03). Some of them mentioned:

Social media is like a panoptic box of what I did. Imagine I was almost a social media addict! (SNP-03).

Twitter is very informative, very clashing, that’s the Twitter audience, clashing, information, firm stance and what you want the press to replicate. Instagram is also, it’s always been political. The only platform that I use for fun and trending stuff is TikTok. Instagram is more informative and more about images, photos, press releases... (SNP-01).

I use Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp (CDCO-01).

The image of women politicians to be disseminated on digital platforms

The women pointed out that in general there is a sociocultural construction that establishes patterns for women who decide to become politicians to have a “tough image”. This has an impact on what they consider to be “what we should post in social media” (CDCO-04), and in turn is related to the expectations generated towards them and the dynamics of their political environment. They mentioned that building this leadership image means that they have to look like men, either in aggressiveness, tone and modulation of voice, and sometimes even in the way they dress. If they do not conform to the standards of toughness, they risk appearing weak and “starchy⁶⁰ and soft” (CDCE-04), that is, lacking in power. They also said that sometimes the opposite situation occurs, because if they speak up and demand changes, they are labeled as “hysterical, crazy and contrary” (CDCO-03). These are factors that, as they mentioned, they must take care of so that people “like them on social media and in public spaces” (CDCE-04). Some told the following:

Dad went to the event because he is my mentor. He guides me every day with his advice. Well, I finished my speech and I asked him how was it, and he said “it was very good, very good content, good message, you talked about this and that, but there is something you lacked. You speak very softly. When you make a speech, try to make your tone of voice, your intensity, more decisive”. “Dad, I don’t want to talk like a man,” I told him... ”And you don’t have to. But you have to change that aspect of yourself” he said (CDCE-02).

(...) it is an obstacle that I believe comes with machismo. That men can speak loudly and women have to be quiet, nice, always saying yes, yes, yes, yes, we cannot confront, we cannot question. And it is not like that (CDCE-09).

60 The process through which clothing is whitened and stiffened by mixing starch with water.

(...) it is very difficult to do politics as a woman here in Paraguay. First, because there is a lot of violence against women, when we speak loudly, that is, when we raise our voices a little, we are called crazy, hysterical. We can't raise our voices like men do because we are labeled as crazy. If we complain, we are too whiny (CDCE-06).

(...) they see you as a, I don't know if a threat, but they see you as a trouble maker (CDCE-08).

As a woman politician you always have to be very polished (CDCE-010).

4.4. Perceptions on technology-facilitated gender-based violence.

Women politicians exposed to TFGBV

Political activity in Paraguay implies being exposed to different types of aggressions. The voices of the women interviewed stated that they are unprotected when they are involved in politics. One of them said:

Yes, I feel harassed for doing my work in politics (CDCE-08).

Women unanimously indicated that digital violence exists and is dangerous. They pointed out that they are inevitably exposed to aggressions, especially on social media. They mentioned that "...violence is not only physical, it is also verbal and digital. They coerce you, they discriminate against you, they tell you 'don't say this, don't talk about that, reducing you to the point where you can't think or analyze, it's as if they are taking away your very essence, the possibility of speaking'" (CDCE-04).

Most of the women interviewed reported cases of violence in which the common factor is the denigration, discrediting and humiliation of women. They said that the possibility of taking action is being curtailed by many situations of aggression.

They identified online harassment, disinformation, network or coordinated harassment, dissemination of non-consensual intimate images, doxxing, stalking and monitoring, defamation and slander, and hate speech as the main types of digital violence against women in politics.

They emphatically stated that social media is "quite threatening and polluting" (CDCE-01) due to the culture implied by their operation. However, they also pointed out that there are some "relaxing" spaces in social media that have to do with approaching constructive people or contacting people with respect and without grievances.

As for the time when they are most exposed to aggressions both online and offline, they mentioned that during the electoral campaign period is when they experience the greatest hostility and danger. They said:

During the campaign, you receive more aggression, especially on election day... they write to you, they call you, they tell you everything, they push you, they hit you (CDCO-04).

Social media bombards you

Currently, the use of digital spaces to generate public conversation is crucial. It is significant that women politicians refer to the term “bombardment” to describe the saturation of interactions that many times cannot be processed due to the volume of information received through their personal accounts. Women indicated that on social media they are “bombarded” with different types of information, i.e., with questions, requests, complaints, violence, among others. It is where everything happens. When aggressions towards their personal accounts on social media occur and increase, they choose to disconnect and prefer not to see the messages, thus avoiding giving a response. They mentioned several types of cases, ranging from attacks on their political management to harassment to find out if they are single or in a relationship, among others. One of them narrated:

(...) It bothers me when they ask about my marital status. Sometimes I say I’m single and then I’m afraid that they will hit on me or stalk me... Then I had to remove my relationship status from my social media. First I was single, then I put ‘in a relationship’ and then I just didn’t put anything, but it’s the same... I still get those kinds of questions all the time (CDCE-05).

They mentioned that in addition to comments from followers and anonymous profiles, trolls and bots, they feel overwhelmed and saturated by algorithms and personalized advertisements that constantly appear on the platforms, the excess of information on certain topics and the constant notifications that pop up on their devices.

The main issues with which they are attacked or receive violence have to do with labeling the person as corrupt, questioning physical aspects, image, age, sexuality, and attacking the woman’s family. Most of the women politicians indicated that they feel more affected when the attacks are directed towards their family members. One of the voices recounted:

The only thing they can attack me with... I mean, they can attack on whatever, but where I will really feel affected is with my family, with my children. (CDCE-010)

The channels through which the aggressions reach the women differ according to their profile and trajectory, some reported getting messages in their social media (whether in the public or private profile), others stated that they receive violence through WhatsApp messages, phone calls and some mentioned that they receive messages on their partners’ phone.

There is a difference in the type of channels for bullying. On the one hand, there are massive attacks from anonymous profiles, trolls and bots on social media and, on the other hand, the sending of direct threatening messages via WhatsApp or phone calls. The latter are generally less massive, but more intimidating. The objective of these attacks, they said, is usually related to the enemy team’s planning to weaken the position, vision and political strength of the movements or parties in which women are involved and to diminish the power of women’s leadership.

4.5. Identification of TFGBV types

The following are some manifestations of technology-facilitated gender-based violence that were identified and described by the female politicians who participated in the group and individual interviews.

Online harassment

Women politicians mentioned a wide range of incidents that are classified as online harassment. These communications are characterized by cases of aggression related to the body or image, sexuality, racial aspects and socioeconomic level of the person, among others. When the attacks are frequent and massive, women reported feeling distressed and fearful.

They found that these cases are not frequent with men and that this type of violence ignores central aspects to assume some position or to be elected, such as the elements of capacity and suitability of the person, and, on the contrary, focuses the attention for the attack on irrelevant facts. They added that these messages generally seek to make the person feel “less” and get weak due to “separations” (which may be breakups or misunderstandings between partners or close people). Some of them mentioned:

I remember once when a parliamentarian came in and told me “you’re very fat”. I don’t think any of them would dare to tell a minister that he is fat... I don’t think anyone would walk into a ministerial office and greet the Minister of Economy telling him that he is fat... Those statements regarding body size or weight are made to women and not men... and then they send by WhatsApp these comments as a mockery. (MPJ-01)

(...) once when I was running for an important position... a friend of mine called me and said: “you have to lose weight because you are going to talk to the committees and you have to be a bit thinner... Because this morning, X (woman) who was running for X position came in to talk to us”, –not the one I wanted–, and when she left, everybody said “Oh my God ikyra ko kuña (Translation: Oh my God, this woman is so fat!). (MPJ-01)

There is everything on social media... The comments are of all kinds, from the nonsense of ‘old and ugly’, to more aggressive things like “briber” and “theft”... At the beginning it affected me, but then it didn’t, because people started responding to the fake profiles defending me. (SNP-02)

(...) a lot was said about me, seeking to discredit my role as leader of the party. Because they do not want to acknowledge when a woman has her own criteria and fights for her space out of conviction. So, there is always a “but” ... They even attacked my morale when they realized that they could not discredit me for my political work, so they looked elsewhere (...) (SNP-01)

They mentioned that when the harassment is directed at the women politician by mentioning a family member, the impact expands, since online harassment not only affects the targeted politicians, but also their family members. One of the women politicians commented:

(...) the violence expands, and one of the main victims was my son, when they fabricated a case to link him to drugs, to marijuana... it was a lie! but what am I going to explain? Or when they say that I play around with men, imagine your son hearing that his mother is called this! imagine your mother receiving the fake rumors about her daughter! (SNP-03).

They pointed out that break-ups within their family relationships are a target for this type of violence, since, “it is not that you are going to get separated because of this, but it generates discomfort... they make your life miserable” (CDCE-010). Most of the women shared that the aggressions are also sent to their partners, via WhatsApp, and that usually intensifies during election campaign period. One of the women commented:

(...) I really suffered a lot, a lot of political violence in my political life and until now... I remember they used to text my husband via WhatsApp telling him things like that I was with other men, and as the election day approached, they insisted even more and my husband just laughed because in my city and in Cordillera we all know each other (CDCO-01).

Disinformation

The women politicians interviewed reported that one of the most common types of digital violence they face is disinformation. Through it, various adversaries try to install incorrect ideas about the person. One of the attributes they try to place on people has to do with corruption, they shared that “they tell you all the time that you are corrupt. And you never did anything ... Public officials must be exposed and must toughen their skin” (SNP-01).

Another attribute that they referred to as part of the disinformation has to do with comments about women’s aptitude for public office. They said that they receive aggressions when ideas circulate that they are “useless” for the position, one of them commented “...they circulate rumors that we do not do anything in the institution...” (MPE-01).

They also mentioned that another attribute of disinformation is when their words are misrepresented, since ideas that were not said are published or taken out of context. They mentioned that with these misrepresentations they usually seek to show some inconsistency in terms of their political stance on a given issue and/or sometimes seek to ridicule women in society in order to discredit them.

In order to establish disinformation as an idea that permeates the conscience and opinion of citizens, they commented that it relies on manipulation of images/videos/audios and the circulation of humorous memes.

They said that disinformation generally circulates initially in social media and sometimes the media echoes it. In view of the dissemination of disinformation through the media, the women politicians said that on occasions they demanded their right to reply. Those who did so, mentioned that they are worn out by the situation because they have to explain something that never existed. One of the testimonies tells that:

I had to prepare a defense, a one-page document to defend myself, imagine that I had to defend myself from a lie, from something I never had to defend myself from (SNP-03).

They also commented that disinformation can overthrow governments and deprive politicians of positions and seats. Specifically, they recalled the situation of the Municipality of Asunción, where the former mayor, Mario Ferreiro, had to resign due to a set-up of false evidence, which the Prosecutor’s Office took as true and ended up being unfounded facts.

The women agreed that one of the direct consequences of digital violence due to disinformation is to discourage the participation of other women, since the circulation of videos/images/memes and audios with manipulated information show a scenario of hostility and aggression towards women.

Network or coordinated harassment

Women identify that most of the violent attacks they receive are not spontaneous and are organized and coordinated by political adversaries, who use lies to gain political advantage. They refer that these attacks occur under a chain effect in all digital platforms. Generally, politicians who use these smear mechanisms are people who have many economic resources. Systematic and coordinated digital violence to what is considered a political target entails sustaining a whole operational structure that permanently works to install negative ideas about a certain person. They add that there are people hired to generate digital aggressions, since “they hire people to carry out digital violence, who intimidate with stories and lies on social media”. (SNP-3)

They mentioned that digital violence through networked or coordinated harassment is characterized by anonymity, since women do not always identify the perpetrators of the aggression. They added that this type of violence uses several transmission channels to carry out the aggression, one of them said:

(...) they prepared the WhatsApp group for the smear campaign, on Facebook and Twitter as well (CDCO-03).

The effectiveness of the installation of negative ideas gains strength in articulation with other media actors working in social media such as influencers, who amplify certain materials or posts that are part of the planned aggression. One of the testimonies mentioned this:

They have a lot of money, they have institutional control and they have created not only bot farms that are artificial. They have one person who manages 10 phones or 10 accounts, but they also have their influencers. They have people who get paid, in many cases with public money, to systematically be violent. And if you start looking at the accounts, they are dedicated exclusively to two, three or four people and those are their targets, and this is permanent (SNP-03).

Aggressions become stronger when they are replicated through troll or bot accounts. They stated that these events are closely linked to “non-persons”, “non-people”, “those who don’t show their faces”, “users without faces”, they said:

Yes, I am attacked. The aggressions come basically from trolls. Very few are those who are not trolls or I don’t know what the others are called... bots or something like that. Very few are people, they look like people, but they’re not. Most of them don’t seem to be real people (...) (SNP-02).

There is an intertwined relationship between various subjects that operate in a network to install violence: real people, whether paid or not, trolls/artificial farms, influencers and the media. The installation of messages gains strength through the amplification of the content when it “goes viral” in social media and its replication also occurs in other media outlets and contexts, to finally reach the personal conversation of the community, through the “word of mouth” of the people.

Within the framework of organized attacks, the interviewees mentioned that they receive planned aggressions through WhatsApp, where, according to them, the action had two purposes: -denigrating their public image, with citizens, and, -Affect their emotional stability with situations of nervousness, stress and/or anxiety. One of them said:

(...) they set up a WhatsApp group, but they didn’t include me and they sent me everything they said about me. I think it was to provoke people to criticize me if they saw me around... Or to disturb me mentally... They would send me screenshots of everything that was said (CDCO-04).

It is worth mentioning the amplification that offline macho/sexist practices can have, when they are amplified in social media. In this sense, the dissemination, expansion and even online promotion of harassment or “flirting” practices by male political colleagues is significant. In this regard, a woman politician expressed:

Here, groping, flirtatious remarks or compliments are normal, and if that’s published, everyone celebrates and then everyone acts like winners (SNP-03).

A field for further analysis and future research is the passage or transition from offline to digital violence or vice versa.

Dissemination of intimate image without consent

Women politicians mentioned having experienced digital violence through the dissemination of non-consensual intimate images. Some of them stated that they had experienced this situation with ex-partners, but preferred not to give details because they felt uncomfortable remembering the aggression. On the other hand, some of the interviewed reported that strangers used to access their social media in an attempt to obtain and extract information and/or images of them without their consent. Some of them commented that they had the experience of unknown persons taking photographs of women in swimsuits and disseminating them through digital media and press outlets, which they said are “kachiãi” (translation: humorous). One of them detailed:

As I am the first woman in my city to occupy a departmental seat, I posted something on Twitter... And as a result of that, people were able to access my social media accounts and found an old photo of me in a bathing suit in a swimming pool. This made tabloids make further publications casting doubt about what I was going to wear on my upcoming oath of office ceremony... clothes do not give them the right to disrespect you. Because a woman is denigrated for wearing short shorts, for example... In Paraguay we have a macho country. (CDCE-08).

Another aspect to consider under this modality of digital violence is that the expansion of violence also affects technical collaborators in the workplace of women politicians. Thus, one of the female politicians commented: “They started to be very aggressive with one of my collaborators. Very aggressive. They mount pictures of her in a bikini with the image of the Congress” (SNL-03). They were able to narrate that once they obtain the intimate image of the person, they also proceed to manipulate the backgrounds of the places where these women were located or edit physical aspects of their image.

Doxxing

Women politicians commented that doxxing is one of the most dangerous types of digital violence because it exposes their sensitive personal information. On the one hand, they said that malicious people who want to attack, obtain and publish their phone numbers, emails, home or work addresses, personal photos and/or other personal information. Sometimes, the publication of this information is accompanied by a call or invitation for massive action against the politician. They defined that this information is commonly shared in order to carry out smear campaigns.

One of the interviewees narrated that on one occasion a horde of “rented” people threw objects at her home, causing significant damage such as broken roof tiles and environmental pollution, since in addition to throwing stones to the house, they also threw stink bombs, “I was ashamed because my neighbors saw everything and the smell around my house was awful... they threw some stinky things on the roof and broke a lot of roof tiles” (SNP-03).

They also reported that they are used to receiving messages from unknown numbers and that on some occasions they receive messages and/or calls with death threats, they said:

you receive death threats in social media, from fake profiles (CDCO-04).

(...) but I was most scared when they called me on my phone... (SNP-03).

A characteristic of this type of violence is the use of personal data, such as the legal name, thus, one of them said that she had to go through an uncomfortable event and identified it as digital abuse. She mentioned that the market takes advantage of political figures to profit from digital platforms, and said that she received a message from a person offering to sell her the website: [www.\(with her name\).com](http://www.(with her name).com), the seller told her:

I see that between 10,000 and 15,000 people search for information about you on Google each month, and ideally, you should have a page showcasing everything you've done... If you're interested, let me know and we can come to an agreement

The woman reflected saying:

This person wants to sell me to myself... How do platforms allow this? Imagine that they use your identity to set up a for-profit platform. But what happens if I don't accept? what happens? It's pure and simple blackmail, I'm not going to buy myself and what if they start using it now for something else (SNP-03).

In this type of violence, they described frequent episodes of blackmail and extortion.

Stalking and monitoring

Women politicians shared that digital violence is also manifested by the stalking and monitoring of publications, by the control and monitoring of their activities to expose them online, and in some cases, by the location of their devices and because they saw individuals following and bothering them.

Some examples refer that women are photographed without their consent, whether in the supermarket, in public places, when they go to a restaurant, among others, and that these photos are usually sent to WhatsApp groups. They reported that these photos are taken with the malicious intent to damage their public image, they said "for example I was photographed when I was in the food court of a supermarket... they took a picture of me with my mouth open when I was eating and sent it by WhatsApp; one of the members of the group forwarded it to me" (CDCE-10).

They commented that there are higher risk experiences when their phones or accounts are cloned or hacked and that is when stalking and monitoring occurs at a high level. One of them said:

She cloned my messages... she cloned my WhatsApp messages to her WhatsApp. And she had a lot of information about me and she got into my private life. She could see all the information, documents, photos and audios that I received (CDCE-01).

Libel and slander

The women reported that there are cases of digital violence where they are defamed and slandered to damage their image and diminish their political strength. The interviewees agreed that one of the challenges for this type of situation is to identify and individualize the people who make statements with false information.

Some women were able to bring cases of violence to Court, accusing the individuals for defamation and slander, and they ended up being sanctioned, demonstrating that the women were being set up and that damage was perpetrated against them. What the women regretted is that, no matter how much justice may rule in favor of a woman in a given case, the damage done is already installed in society and the reputation and image are damaged by this type of violence. One of the women mentioned:

I went to court because I sued three people for defamation, slander and libel. I will not mention them, but in the three cases they had to apologize publicly and retract everything they said about me. But the damage has already been done to me because defamation is not a political opinion, it is an aggression (SNL-01).

Hate speech

The women reported that hate speech gains strength as politicians gain notoriety. These include denigrating women politicians for “being a woman” and considering that they are not prepared or qualified for politics. They said that hate speeches are generally directed to denigrate their social origin (“peasant”), skin color (“moopio oikua’ata pea”), sexual orientation, political position (“leftist, progressive”) and image issues (“fat”). Intersectionality is very visible in this type of violence, since it is clear how all the elements are used interdependently to humiliate and belittle the person.

The female politicians mentioned that they fear that these hate speeches could lead to physical aggressions, since they feel that they were consolidating negative feelings towards them, they said: “...we feel that our lives are in danger because of the violent content they disseminate” (CDCO-04).

In one case, a female politician shared a video targeting her that went viral on social media and in WhatsApp groups. The video, which was 50 seconds long, featured various voices and text accompanied by special music, and said the following:

*She's a clown... what a clown she is.
Clown and delinquent, we know she is a circus performer.
A tremendous ignorant.
She wants to fight against Cartes
and that poor miserable can't fight against anyone.
And you are so ridiculous.
You are such a clown, and on top of that you are a delinquent.
She's a sort of dictator
We belong to the XXX media.
You are a donkey, a big donkey.
A member of the mob.
Yes. Then again, she has the audacity to file this complaint
for harassment and for publication of fake news...*

*The media are tools for dissemination.
Go fuck yourselves.
We are going to say whatever we want,
whenever we want, ok, take the (inaudible) if you don't like it, that's just the law.
So (name),
We have plenty of time for you because you truly deserve it. You deserve it.
(End of the video)*

4.6. Types of aggressors or perpetrators

Perpetrators by frequency of action

Women politicians reported that perpetrators or aggressors can belong to different types of contexts: personal, professional, public and/or private.

They also pointed out in the different accounts that there are certain types of perpetrators who are identified on the basis of the frequency of violence with which they attack and are credible and affect them in different ways. Based on these attributes, some perpetrators can be habitual, occasional and punctual. A matrix with the characterization of these types of aggressors is presented below:

TABLE 2. Types of perpetrators according to frequency of technology-facilitated gender-based violence

Description	Types of Perpetrators		
	Usual	Occasional	Specific
Type	Systemic / Everyday	Contextual	Specific Action
Who	Trolls/Bots / Some Citizens	Political Adversaries, Religious Leaders.	Journalists, Influencers, Business Leaders.
Reach	Low Credibility	Medium Credibility	High Credibility
Impact	Psychological Distress	Effect on Ideological or Political Position	Impact on Integrity and Dignity

◆ Usual

These types of perpetrators carry out their aggressions on a daily and systematic basis. In general, troll profiles, bots, anonymous accounts and some citizen accounts can be identified. These are activated upon any publication made by politicians or any publication that mentions them, on any platform, with the purpose of denigrating them. This type of attack usually has a low level of credibility for citizens. However, the effect on the people who receive the aggression is usually mainly psychological.

◆ Occasional

Occasional perpetrators carry out attacks at specific situations. Mostly, political adversaries or religious leaders are identified in this group. They are activated when a specific law is addressed or when a specific national situation is being discussed. It is estimated that this type of perpetrators have a medium credibility for the citizens. This type of attack affects political and ideological positions.

◆ Specific

This type of aggressors is observed when in a specific way in certain very specific moments they act against a certain political person. Thus, this profile is characterized by the opinions and positions of journalists, influencers, media and businessmen. It is estimated that this type of perpetrator has moderate credibility with the public. It is observed that this type of attack affects the dignity and integrity of the person.

Types of perpetrators by scope of action

Subsequently, to refer to the types of perpetrators in general, according to their sphere of action, they referred to the following types:

◆ Political men

This category is composed of male politicians who are from the same or a different political party or movement than the woman. They use stereotypes against women to establish doubts about women's capacity to hold office. Some of the women described that these men install the idea of playing in an open field or as a game without rules because anyone can enter to dispute a position. This is how they put it:

The fact of being a woman, even if you do your job well, allows anyone who wants to enter the competition, that is to say, if I was not a woman, and the one who was here was a man, it would not have been easy for me to apply from the outside. On the other hand, by being a woman, regardless of the work I do, it seems that the position is open. I reflect and think that it's because they say, "if she is a woman and she can do it...", even if nobody says so, of course the other one will be able to do the job (MPJ-01).

They mentioned that these types of ideas circulate through individual or group WhatsApp comments and reinforce stereotypes of aggression. The types of aggression they usually commit are: online harassment, network harassment, disinformation and defamation and slander.

◆ State authorities

Women politicians mentioned that they are mainly subjected to a network of macho/sexist authorities that generate a context of work pressure, harassment and also, they described as one of the characteristics the omission of responses on cases of violence against women.

They related the existence of complicity between the machista/sexist leadership of the authorities and the institutional apparatus, activating a device that, according to them, manifests itself through the lax intervention of the Public Prosecutor's Office and senseless sanctions or disciplinary measures. One of the affected politicians recounted:

It is not that the investigation was dismissed, which was super improper, but rather that I was advised that I need to moderate my language (SNL-03).

They said that some authorities use the institutions to "mold" the statements in social media and media, perceiving that there is an attempt to regulate the possibility for them to express their voice and ideas to society.

They also pointed out that State authorities commit violence by stereotyping the capacity and role of women, as they generally place them in certain types of positions. For example, some women in the legislature noted that they chair important but not highly significant committees, since some of them referred that there are stereotyped roles associated with “the sensitivity and sometimes weakness of women”. The more powerful or national significant positions, such as Budgetary or Constitutional Committees, are exclusively reserved for men. In this way, they indicate that social media and the media propagate a type of image of women politicians linked to less relevant issues and initiate a cycle of almost exclusive association of women politicians with children, youth, women and culture. One of the voices narrated:

(...) the most important Committees are reserved for men, those of relevance... So women are placed in Childhood, in social issues, in Human Rights issues... but the Constitutional Committee, for example, which is in line of succession to the Presidency, is always chaired by men. The Board of Directors, President and Vice-President, all men... And women are the secretaries. So, there is a lot of institutional violence. The few women who make it to these positions are not given an autonomous agenda, but are required to vote according to a political group. Women may be placed as Vice-President of Congress, but they are not given significant voice or influence (SNP-03).

They mentioned that, in order to validate situations such as the one described in the previous paragraph, they make use of situations in social media where the opinion of the citizens themselves reinforces stereotypes towards women. Generally, the use of the types of violence of online harassment, network harassment, sometimes dissemination of non-consensual intimate images, doxxing, stalking and monitoring, disinformation and defamation and slander is observed.

◆ Media

The interviewees mentioned that online violence is amplified in certain newspapers, TV and radio programmes. These platforms use programs that are extremely violent because of the content of the messages they distribute. On the one hand, women commented that their political adversaries try to use these spaces to denigrate their image; in general, there are certain spaces (types of programs or journalists) that are hired or prepared to reproduce aggressive ideas against women. Thus, one of them narrated:

(...) there are programs that have a line of who to target...and they speak poorly about this person all the time...they repeat and repeat it so that something sticks in the public (CDCE-03).

The type of digital violence most used by these perpetrators is disinformation.

◆ Companies

Women politicians identified banks or financial institutions as perpetrators of violence, as they said that they take the publications related to corruption that are reproduced by the media and call women to inquire about such facts. Some women who have gone through this situation said that these events were staged by malicious teams and that they had to go to the financial entity to clarify unfounded and unrealistic questions. They stated that they understand the banking protocols, but that given the wave of disinformation that is circulating, they feel that the violence is amplified when they are summoned by these entities. The type of violence they mostly reproduce is that of disinformation.

◆ **Social media platforms that moderate content**

The women identified social media platforms as perpetrators when account blocking measures are not effective in cases of actual violence. They said that in many cases they have succeeded in blocking accounts of bots, trolls or people who promote hate speech, but that when the attacks towards them are made in the Guaraní language, the platforms do not understand them and the aggression remains. They also mentioned that these platforms use their data to send them a significant amount of unwanted advertising. They mentioned as types of violence in this case the online harassment, network harassment, stalking and monitoring and a constant fear that doxxing cases might be leaked through these platforms.

◆ **Anonymous profiles**

The politicians mentioned that these types of profiles are used to make offensive comments. They mentioned that sometimes they are just as aggressive as troll or bot accounts, but sometimes they are less offensive. They agreed in saying:

(...) they are the ones who do not have faces, but you know that they are people who hide, they usually say things to you, sometimes not so aggressive, but it is violence after all, for example, they usually call me stupid... and I also call them stupid (SNP-02).

The types of violence mostly perpetrated by these profiles are those of harassment, defamation and slander, and sometimes they are functional to online harassment.

◆ **Influencers**

Women politicians mentioned that people who act as influencers sometimes perpetrate violence against them by reproducing or amplifying the violence generated. In general, they contribute to violence through disinformation and sometimes, when they are influencers of anti-rights groups, hate speech is added. The women reported that when they operate under the modality of network harassment, they generally get paid for reproducing the aggressions.

◆ **Groups coordinated by Trolls, troll farms and bots**

The types of perpetrators mostly identified by women politicians are trolls, troll farms and bots. They said that these profiles are directly at the service of those who decide to pay for them to generate aggressions against certain political targets. The anonymity with which these profiles operate functions as a mechanism of impunity to disinform, generate hate speech and harass. They mentioned that "...what bothers about these troll profiles or bots is that they are massive and when they attack, something of what they say sticks with people" (CDCE-06), "...one gets used to receiving troll attacks but the problem is that sometimes people believe what they say". (CDCO-01)

◆ Political parties

Women mentioned that political parties act as perpetrators when their members, through the use of spontaneous messaging (WhatsApp), spread rumors or conspiratorial ideas to displace women who show leadership. Some women politicians from the opposition indicated that the violence that exists internally in the parties differs depending on the political party. Although most of them indicated that there is violence in all parties, some testimonies reaffirm that there is more violence within the National Republican Association Party, one of them explained the following:

“(...) in the Colorado Party it’s evident that men are intolerant towards women. In the Liberal Party, there are very few people that we can detect... We don’t have a Yamil Esgaib, for example, and like others, right? We rather detect that old machismo, but when you challenge it, they back down. They say: “no, why is she saying anything, she should stay at home” and when you say, “wait a minute, what did you say?” they back down. In other words, I believe that in my party the fact that women have to be given space has been installed. In fact, we voted for parity, which doesn’t mean that they are not sexist or that they don’t maintain those sexist stereotypes. But in my party there are many wives, daughters and partners militating and even reaching elective positions. So I think my party has evolved quite a bit in that sense” (SNP-02).

◆ Organized crime group and drug trafficking

The women reported that organized crime is increasingly present in Paraguayan politics. They mentioned that these groups are aggressors and perpetrators because they introduce a lot of money to discredit political profiles through dirty campaigns. Among the types of violence they use they highlighted online harassment, network harassment, disinformation, doxxing, stalking and monitoring and hate speeches. One of them mentioned:

We are very concerned about how drug traffickers have been entering politics for some years now. The worst thing is that they win in almost all representative positions and they start to build their support networks... they have people everywhere, who do what they say in exchange for money... I think that the biggest enemy Paraguay has now is drug trafficking” (CDCO-03).

◆ Anti-rights profiles and protesters

Some women politicians shared that in general, perpetrators who respond to anti-rights and protester profiles direct their speeches and aggressions mainly to women “for being a woman”, to the LGTBQ+ community, as well as, in recent times, against positions related to the defense of climate change. In general, they identify that this profile of aggressors shows traditionalist behaviors. They said “...now they call you gay, lesbian or globalist for anything ... ah! And they also say: don’t let international communities get involved” (CDCE-03). These perpetrators generally use disinformation, online harassment and hate speech.

◆ Justice

The interviewees said that currently, the judicial branch is a type of aggressor, since instead of creating conditions to ensure the protection of women, on the contrary, they feel insecure and exposed due to the lax action it demonstrates. They mentioned that justice acts according to the interests of sexist political adversaries:

(...) instead of defending us, they reinforce the fear and anxiety that violence imposes on us. (SNP-03)

To complement the illustrative information on this type of perpetrators, one of the politicians described the legal actions she took to report the violence she experienced. She recounted that she filed four complaints and approximately six public deeds during her period as a parliamentarian, with the objective of “putting it on the record”. However, she described the actions of the institutions in charge as lax or non-existent. She regretted that, when she contacted the authorities to alert about the death threat she was receiving through her phone, the response was “whoever is going to kill you doesn’t warn you” (SNP-03), adding that she even had the phone number from which she received the threat and hoped that at least they would start the investigation and find out who was the person sending the messages.

Women politicians recognize that they are not the only victims of institutional inaction and this is serious. One of them referred:

There is not enough institutional awareness of the seriousness. Women are not considered in the institutional perspective of practically any institution. ...if they do this digital and psychological violence with women politicians who have privileges... who have visibility.... So, if they don’t take action with us, imagine what it’s like for a woman who’s trying to seek a restraining order or asking for alimony. (SNP-03)

They added that one of the main barriers to reducing the rates of violence has to do with the lack of specialized prosecutors. The lack of knowledge on the part of agents assigned to receive complaints is a major risk that undermines the culture of violence prevention.

4.7. Reflections on Law No. 5777/16 “Comprehensive Law for the protection of women against all forms of violence”.

With the implementation of Law No. 5777/16, mechanisms are available to address cases of violence, as its objective is to establish policies and strategies to prevent violence towards women. In addition, the law includes measures for attention, protection, sanction and comprehensive redress, both in the public and private spheres. A noteworthy aspect of this law is that it classifies femicide as a crime.

The women interviewed stated that laws can always be improved and that evaluations of them are necessary in order to adjust them over time. It should be noted that many of the women are still unaware of the content of the law itself.

At this point, they clearly identified the need to expand the law, given that it is crucial to find mechanisms to ensure its effective implementation. They emphatically pointed out that this law must exist and be properly enforced, since previously, without the law, this type of violence was not typified and, therefore, there were no penalties or appropriate sentences. Thus, some recounted:

-Previously there was no such figure and everything happening to women had to be treated as a common crime within the judicial system. Today, that is not the case. Today there are people convicted, according to the data. I understand, though I'm not sure if these are current figures, that 38 cases have already been convicted for femicide, there are more than 500 cases of attempted femicides that are open and are being processed by the justice system. (SNP-01)

(...) what is reported statistically is a lot, and for those who do not report, there is certainly much more... Many times, women don't file a complaint when they're economically dependent and cannot fend for themselves, because they don't work and they're afraid to raise their children alone. (CDCO-01)

I believe that, although it may seem difficult to achieve cultural change, we need to be like a drop that falls, falls, falls and eventually gets results. I think we need to do that because the law exists, but it's very difficult to apply when the very person enforcing it holds the same beliefs we are fighting against... They think the opposite of the law or act in a certain way at home, and of course, they also act that way in their Court. So I think we don't have to expect everything from the law and we have to train people... There are so many things that suddenly people think it is non-violence and it's violence, and so on... that's what we have to improve. (MPJ-01)

Also, some women pointed out the need to create specialized Courts to improve the implementation of the law, because without this, it is difficult to have a good application of the law. They mentioned that there is currently a lot of ignorance about the law, because if a person goes to a judge “it depends a lot on individual criteria and that is where the weakness lies” (SNL-03). They added that:

(...) based on experience, based on statistical data, it's necessary to have specialists to fight against femicide and prevent it” (SNP-01). There are some cases where women politicians told us that they invoked the aforementioned law to address the violence they experienced, as they told us: “...they gave me the precautionary measure. And it was within the framework of Law 5777, it was a Court in my city. There is no public policy line regarding the protection system and in this period there has been a huge setback. We reported political violence to activate the law in the framework of this campaign against me (SNP-03).

Some reflected that sometimes citizens want to know a lot of information about the victim or details about the violence that occurred, this is promoted by certain types of television programs or social media. They said that one of the points they take care of is the “confidentiality of the case” because of the sensitive data that is handled and that sometimes, taking care of this criterion makes the public speak out against the institutions by criticizing their management. They indicated that sometimes some people “romanticize” the work they do on gender issues or “relativize” it and state that as an institution they do not perform what is expected. They said:

(...) in compliance with Law 5777, in one of its articles that talks about confidentiality...what we are doing is protecting the victim, not exposing the victim to the general public, to the media, to social media, because these situations are delicate, where the center of everything is a human being. Behind a victimized woman, there is a family, there are children, there is a lot behind and that is something that one has to take care of and protect (MPE-01).

Other women pointed out that material conditions are needed to achieve adequate training and the expected effectiveness in terms of law enforcement. Not having funding from the State for certain issues and resorting to seeking international funds to develop campaigns on certain issues, shows how conditioned or fragile the system of implementation of protection laws is, and sometimes if these international funds are not available, the effectiveness of the laws to generate changes in society becomes even more complex. This is how they related it:

(...) it should be remembered that with the international community, training was provided on very important issues, such as domestic violence and the establishment of mobile police stations for the protection of women... I believe that at that time there was a greater institutional culture. Funding from the international community was withdrawn, it used to come and now it doesn't, and this has hindered the efficient implementation of laws. Everything was weakened. The same thing happened with the CODENIS... I can tell you this because when I was a councilman and the CODENIS were being formed there and there was a lot of support. There were trainers hired by the European Union, Spain, USA... I don't remember the exact name of the international programs, but community meetings were held. They talked about and articulated the networks. That was very important (SNP-03).

In general terms, the experiences narrated by the women speak of the absence of debate around a competent legislation on digital violence against women politicians and also pointed out that, although there is a mention in Law 5777/16, it needs to be expanded for its implementation to be effective in the treatment instances.

4.8. Impacts of the TFGBV against women politicians

The interviewees indicated that the impact of digital violence against women politicians has repercussions on the quality of democracy in the country, since there is a discouragement to women's participation in the political field based on the hostility shown online.

They mentioned that the intensification of digital violence generates a psychological affectation in women politicians, since they experience increasing degrees of fear, stress, anxiety, sadness and other harmful feelings for their quality of life.

As a derivation of this psychological affectation, they indicated that, in serious cases of harassment and aggression, women fear for the possible passage from online violence to the offline field, the most worrying and dangerous being those related to death threats. They indicated that this means living in a state of permanent alert, i.e. "24 hours a day, 7 days a week".

They commented that there is also damage to their reputation, as digital attacks are installing negative ideas about them, directly affecting the potential of their political careers.

They also said that there is self-censorship among women, who, instead of expressing and positioning themselves, remain in silence and maintain the status quo, thus, they indicated:

(...) women like us who speak out, who do not have filters, who say what we want, are subjected to a much higher level of violence while others self-censor. I tell you this because of my ex-colleagues... And in the end they say I want too much camera attention... It's always my fault again. So there is this constant whip telling you: no, you got what you were asking for. And then I think, "What did I do?" (SNP-03).

They said that this self-censorship is online and offline, thus, some women's voices disappear on digital platforms and social media as in public spaces, "...you decide not to send the message you wanted to send to the groups or not to post what you really think and you post something else (CDCE-01).

One of the interviewees pointed out that at the moment of giving a key speech of great reference due to the political situation of violence that her case represented for the republic and democracy, she preferred not to mention the threat of physical elimination she received, because she considered that the most important thing at that moment was to focus attention on the harm that was being done to the Republic. She indicated that the plan to remove her from the political stage was to humiliate her and make her appear as a 'hysteric,' thereby making her less credible. She recounted the following:

(...)we had to censor ourselves on very serious issues, so as to be able to amplify and prioritize a republican message. In other words, on many occasions, I censored myself, I did not tell many things because I am sure that part of the planning and dimensions of violence is to make women seem crazy, like hysterics who are constantly denouncing (SNP-03).

One of the impacts identified is the leap from digital violence to offline violence, where the loss of investiture of elected women in the Senate became effective. Women recognized that the case of former senator Katty González is an example of how digital violence has been escalating as a potential for aggression. From starting campaigns in social media with the hashtag #FueraKatty, it escalated to threats of physical elimination, ultimately resulting in her being removed from her seat, legitimately obtained with more than one hundred thousand votes from the citizens. The interviewees shared that the greater the public visibility and political positioning, the greater the violence a person receives.

Women pointed out that constant digital harassment sometimes has an indirect impact on their productivity as politicians and managers, since they have to limit their actions or spend time to clarify unfounded situations.

The women mentioned that there are no internal party or movement mechanisms or protocols that address the issue of violence against women politicians in general and even less so in the digital sphere. Some commented that they feel a great shock when there is internal silence in political organizations, which instead of speaking out on certain facts, prefer to remain silent. In contrast to the absence of protocols as part of the institutional framework of the parties or movements, they stated that in general there are Women's Commissions within the organizational charts, but they are limited to the formal compliance of "a place for women" and not to promoting the necessary lines and actions to combat and prevent violence.

They added that there is a perceived lack of institutional response or inaction, training and sensitization on gender issues among professionals in the field of justice. When a woman files a complaint for harassment, she feels that she does not receive an adequate response to the situation and instead of feeling protected, she feels doubly insecure, threatened and unprotected due to the lack of institutional action. Thus, this makes people feel afraid and beaten by the context:

It was like this all the time. I file a complaint for harassment and nothing happens..... There came a time when it really affected me. I was paranoid. I was really scared. I didn't want to go out and I was desperate (SNP-03).

Finally, they mentioned that in addition to discouraging women's political participation, another negative impact they observe due to digital violence is the abandonment of political careers. This situation strengthens the gender gap in terms of participation, representation and quality of democracy.

4.9. Responses and mechanisms for protection and support

Women politicians pointed out that the functioning of State institutions to ensure the protection of women against all types of violence, including digital violence, is a pending issue in the country. In view of this, women reported that they take individual and collective measures to protect themselves against digital aggression.

The responses and mechanisms of protection and support given by women politicians to the offenses received on digital platforms and social media vary according to their profile and background. Some decide not to respond to offenses and not to sustain a negative interaction on platforms and social media, others mentioned that they respond with the same frequency and language with which they receive the attack. They said:

Many, many times I answer them as equals... I also attack them... I started to answer them this way when the aggressions were too strong... If someone called me stupid, I called them stupid too... (SNP-02).

Regarding the approach taken by women to alleviate the impact of the attacks on themselves and their families, some of them said that when they decided to get into politics, they decided to alert their relatives of the exposure they would be facing and, above all, to establish protection mechanisms. One of them said: "Regarding family, from the very beginning and for a long time ago, there was a dialogue about social media. Especially with my children and with my mother who is older and who suddenly assimilates all the information she receives in a different way because... well, she is from another era where social media did not exist" (MPE-01).

Many women said that they do not completely read the messages that are negative, and skip reading them in order to connect only with comments that are at least rational and real in the statement of facts. They added that making this decision implies suffering less stress and gaining more quality of life, i.e. quality time, since they indicated that “imagine the time it takes to read all the messages, especially if they are negative” (MPE-01).

Another aspect they pointed out is that sometimes it is not necessary to respond to the attackers because doing so gives them a sense of importance, and it is better to leave them in a place of “irrelevance and non-existence” (SNP-03). They reflected that these situations are exhausting, tiring and demotivating, so it is better not to look at them.

They mentioned that the first time they received the attacks was painful. However, on subsequent occasions it no longer hits them with the same intensity, and they added that “a person gets used to it” despite how uncomfortable it is. They said that “something that dampens” the violence is when the public intervenes to give their opinion and judge the hateful and disinformation comments. Thus, if a rented, anonymous profile, trolls or bots appear and respond with positive and rational opinions to the negative comment, it represents a “relief”.

As previously mentioned, attacks have the greatest impact when they affect family members. Therefore, some women politicians have taken certain protective measures, such as avoiding posting photos with family members, asking them to be cautious with account encryption, and setting their accounts to private. All of this as a preventive measure, because they said that ‘private information is not respected at all’ (SNP-03). The following testimony is illustrative:

I almost never post anything that is not politically related to my life. I also show what I want to share about my private life. What I don’t post are things that affect others in my circle... I try not to be seen with my friend, my brother... I try to make sure that my environment is not exposed. (SNP-02)

Upon identifying anonymous profiles that are aggressive, trolls, and bots, most block them. They added that, previously, some would also block real person profiles, but following a precedent where a legislator had to unblock a social media user due to constitutional protection, they have decided to unblock real person profiles. One of them described it as follows:

(...) I block and curse them, but I’ve also blocked real people whom I now plan to unblock. After what lawyer Alejandra achieved—obtaining a legal order for a parliamentarian to unblock someone—I realized that it wasn’t right. So now I’m going to unblock all real people, or at least those who appear to be real. The ones with one or five followers are for sure not real. But yes, I interact with them a lot, I mean, either cursing or engaging with jokes and humor. People really like that, right? (SNP-02).

They also mentioned that sometimes they do not block the account, but delete aggressive comments that appear on their posts or feed, whether they are public or private.

4.10. Proposal to stop TFGBV

To address digital violence it is imperative to involve all sectors of society. Thinking about a comprehensive proposal involves dialogue with the platforms involved, with governments, with civil society, with specialized technicians from different disciplines and with the community in general.

When women politicians were asked for their opinion on the elaboration of this proposal, many of them showed a lack of knowledge at first and then undoubtedly mentioned the need to generate dialogues to find safe paths for the digital care of citizens and not only of women politicians. They pointed out that women politicians may be a case study, but the problem affects all sectors and studying the digital dimension is an urgency at this time.

Below are some voices of women politicians who gave their perspectives on a possible proposal:

(...) we need to have a lot of debate. I don't think there can be an individual response to this in a country where, at the moment, there is a real advance toward authoritarianism. Regulating these spaces could be a boomerang for us. We need to create the spaces and listen to the experts. I don't believe that a single enlightened person can have the answer, and furthermore, it is dangerous (SNP-03).

(...) violence is never justified, if I post a violent tweet, I do not have to receive violence, I have to receive a "behave well, Senator", that is, I would have to receive a recommendation, not another violence. Instead, that is not what really happens... I don't know, it's like a chain of violence. I do know that there are mechanisms on social media, where you report to Facebook or Twitter and they block your account for many months, right? but I don't know to what extent this can be legislated (SNP-02).

It's about informing our fellow women above all because, due to misinformation or not having the opportunity to know where to find information or whom to approach or turn to, the cycle of violence continues (CDCO-01).

(...) I think it would be better to work with the children and explain to them... because unfortunately our generation is older, they think that verbal or psychological abuse, as well as digital abuse, are normal (CDCO-04).

(...) they want to subjugate women in general. And women who do not really work or who work at home, who do not have an economic income, are tied down and are stuck in the circle of violence. That is why entrepreneurship is important... We have to think about giving women a tool so that they can defend themselves in life (CDCO-01).

From their experiences and realities, they raised some issues to be considered. Among them, they highlighted the role of education in schools, the education and training of citizens in general, the implementation of communication campaigns to raise awareness to stop the chain of violence, the treatment and approval of a law regulating digital violence, and the management of personal data to ensure digital security. They also mentioned that it is imperative the collaboration and action of the platforms that control the digital world.

They warned about how delicate it is to legislate on freedom of speech in social media, as it is very complex to limit behaviors related to the exercise of freedoms. They said that:

(...) what we must avoid with any regulation is that it becomes the opposite of what we wanted, that is, that in the end it becomes a straitjacket for women politicians, or citizens in general, to use their freedoms to ask questions and express themselves (SNP-03).

They pointed out that, in order to reduce digital violence, it is necessary to know who the people involved in a given event are; measures cannot be applied on “those who have no name or those without faces in social media” (CDCO-02), since sometimes it is not known who the person is and they added that it is not only about knowing who operates the trolls or bots, but also about knowing who pays for the operation of violence. There is a need for justice to work and enforce laws on cases of digital violence.

They indicated that there are women politicians who do not know what violence is, despite the fact that they may live in violence and, therefore, it is essential to find information spaces where people can be oriented as to when certain facts are typified as acts of violence in general and in particular those with digital characteristics, and from this, to know which are the instances to which they can resort.

In particular, they pointed out the need for training spaces for instances of attention and treatment of complaints, that is, to strengthen the capacities of the people who are acting in the Prosecutor’s Office and the Courts, since specialization in cases of violence against women remains a challenge in Paraguay.

On the other hand, they pointed out that, both for political and non-political women, and to break the cycle of violence in general and that of digital aggression, it is necessary to prioritize opportunities for women’s economic insertion into the world of work, since digital violence against women “becomes a dead-end situation” (CDCE-01) when they do not have economic independence.

Some mentioned that until serious and firm measures are taken by State institutions, one recommended approach is to use humor in the face of digital violence. Based on their own experience, they indicate that to ease the impact of digital violence, particularly the ‘bombardment on social media,’ humor ‘saves you from collapsing’ (SNP-03) and becomes a refuge.

Likewise, it is pertinent to strengthen the monitoring of cases of violence in general and to describe and record the digital aggression that occurs at the country level and from this, to map the typologies, the common or different characteristics according to patterns of behaviors and contexts of territories that allow channeling quick and effective responses from the responsible institutions.

5. CONCLUSION

The impact of technology-facilitated gender-based violence is a global crisis that limits the voice and leadership of women in all their diversity. It affects their free choice of education, economic growth, self-expression, and civic engagement.

This research arises in response to the lack of information and awareness about technology-facilitated gender-based violence targeted at women in the political sphere in Paraguay. This type of violence, perpetrated through the use of technology, also hinders efforts to develop and implement effective policies and legislation to prevent and eradicate this form of violence.

It is essential to recognize that these violent actions identified go against the values enshrined in the National Constitution of Paraguay, which guarantee equality and non-discrimination. It is imperative to promote a culture of parity that guarantees the full participation of women in political and public life, without fear of reprisals or discrimination. Gender equality is a fundamental pillar for democratic development and the progress of Paraguayan society as a whole.

The qualitative methodology employed provided a diverse representation of how systematic violence faced by female politicians through the use of technology is identified, manifested, mitigated, and resolved. This violence is highly normalized and, in many cases, naturalized, as daily violence is also observed in the physical work environment, with the digital realm being just an extension. During data collection and analysis, 8 types of technology-facilitated gender-based violence were identified out of the 21 classified by TEDIC. These include: Online harassment, doxxing, misinformation, dissemination of non-consensual intimate images, coordinated harassment, monitoring or surveillance, defamation and hate speech. This does not mean that the others do not exist in the Paraguayan political sphere; rather, it can be concluded that these types of violence are still unknown or minimized by the women politicians who participated in the study, which underscores the urgent need to make these forms of violence more visible and address them with greater depth and rigor.

The interviews helped identified 12 types of perpetrators of violence out of the 17 identified in the theoretical framework, including: male politicians, State authorities, media, banks or financial institutions, social media platforms that moderate content, anonymous profiles, influencers, trolls and troll centers, political parties, organized crime groups, anti-law and anti-justice profiles. Many of the testimonies conclude that the people responsible for the violence are rarely held accountable, and victims often lack timely and adequate access to services and remedies.

The research highlights that the consequences of this type of violence result in psychological distress, since they experience increasing levels of fear, stress, anxiety, sadness and other harmful feelings for their quality of life. However, the greatest fear among female politicians is that this digital violence will escalate into attacks on their physical integrity and security. Therefore, they end up living in a state of alert 24 hours a day and 7 days a week. One of the results of this fear is self-censorship, which is a response to online harassment; this is one of the detrimental effects of this form of violence that impacts the right to freedom of speech and opinion.

On the other hand, Paraguayan women politicians recognize the great contribution of the law against all forms of violence against women - 5777/16. However, they consider that it still lacks the national dissemination needed to be able to offer adequate services and mitigate this type of violence. To date, the policies must rely on international cooperation to disseminate it to their communities, and they consider that this support is very limited because it is not sustained over time.

Another significant challenge recognized in this research is the need to consider the regulation and formulation of evidence-based policies. This research has made a tremendous effort not only to understand the survivors but also to grasp the nature of technology-facilitated gender-based violence and the profiles of the perpetrators: who they are, why they commit these acts, and how they manifest. This gap presents challenges both for survivors seeking justice and resolution, and for policymakers, organizations, and platforms striving to effectively and preventively counteract this type of violence in the digital environment.

Although the Internet can be a means to amplify voices, as well as to promote public policies based on diverse and plural representation in the parliamentary sphere, this will only be possible if the exercise of democratic rights and freedoms in both online and offline world is strengthened. It is essential that the Executive, Legislative and Judicial Branches, together with online platforms and civil society support networks, work together to promote transparency and actively combat gender-based political violence on the Internet. This implies the need for a continuous and coordinated approach among different actors to ensure a safe and respectful online environment.

Limits of the research

Some limitations of the research include the lack of testimonies from Indigenous female politicians and individuals from LGBTQI+ communities, as the methodological approach used for the sample was based on the criterion of women holding representative positions in the national and departmental legislative bodies, as well as women serving as high-ranking authorities in the judiciary and executive branches.

On the other hand, the study's coverage was focused on the departments of Central and Cordillera, as well as the country's capital, Asunción. Therefore, the results are not considered representative.

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