

Political violence against women in Argentina

*FIRST PERSON
ACCOUNTS*





The Study

Violence against women in politics (VAWP) constitutes an obstacle that hinders their full participation in decision-making positions in different spheres and can dissuade more women from entering politics. This not only limits the full enjoyment of their human rights, but also reinforces traditional gender roles in detriment of a more egalitarian society and undermines the quality of democracy. However, unlike domestic violence, it is a scarcely explored problem with scant information available.

The importance of eradicating discriminatory practices that undermine the full enjoyment of women's human rights and that pose an obstacle to the implementation of the Parity Law (Nr. 27.412) highlight the need to explore the issue violence against women in politics. The rising influence of conservative forces that oppose gender equality and the growing visibility of episodes of political violence against women in the region further underscore this need.

The Organization of American States' Inter-American Model Law on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence Against Women in Political Life states that "...'violence against women in the political life' shall be understood as any action, conduct or omission, carried out directly or through third parties that, based on gender, causes harm or suffering to a woman or to various women, which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women of their political rights. Violence against women in the political life may include, but is not limited to, physical, sexual, psychological, moral, economic or symbolic violence." (Article 3)

In order to raise awareness and make visible violence against women in politics -- an incipient topic in the local and regional agenda -- ELA presents ***Political Violence against Women in Argentina: First Person Accounts***, a publication that showcases the first empirical data on this issue with first-hand accounts of women politicians from the Legislative branch of government.



The Methodology

The study combines qualitative and quantitative research. In a first phase, in-depth interviews were carried out with legislators from the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires and the National Congress to inquire about their political trajectories, the main obstacles to participation identified throughout their careers and the prevalence of situations of political violence.

Later, a questionnaire with thirty closed questions was developed and applied to a sample of 45 cases including legislators from the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires and national legislators from eleven provinces representing the whole spectrum of political parties (Buenos Aires, CABA, Chaco, Chubut, Córdoba, Formosa, Jujuy, Santa Fe, San Juan, Mendoza and Misiones).

The main findings

· *A widely extended problem*

Far from being an isolated problem, violence against women in politics is widely extended in our country. When asked about their perception of situations of gender-based violence throughout their political careers, 8 out of 10 legislators surveyed answered affirmatively.

· *Psychological violence, the most frequent form of violence*

When grouping actions according to the type of violence, the two most frequent were psychological (50%) and symbolic (28%). To a lesser extent, legislators referred to situations of economic violence (22%). Lastly, both physical and sexual violence were reported in less than 10% of the cases.

With regards to specific manifestations, 64% of those interviewed were threatened or intimidated during the exercise of their political functions; 58% were prevented from assisting to important meetings or ones where relevant decisions were being made; 53% were unable to speak out in meetings or sessions; and, 27% perceived lesser wages due to their gender.

· *Factors that dissuade women from participating in politics*

When asked about their perception of discrimination against women in the political sphere, 98% of those interviewed answered affirmatively. With regards to obstacles to women's participation in politics, cultural obstacles were the ones most mentioned, namely: family responsibilities (91%), the prevailing culture and its conception of women's role in society (89%), and the lack of support from men (76%). To a lesser extent, the lack of economic resources (64%) and fear for one's physical integrity (18%) were also mentioned.



· *Who and where is violence perpetrated?*

With regards to the sex of the person committing acts of violence, 63% of those interviewed indicated that it was mostly male, 32% that it was indistinctly both male and female and 5% that it was female. On the person's background, the most mentioned options were "someone through social media" (71%), "someone from another political party" (67%) and "someone from my own political party" (67%). As to the place where the acts of violence took place, the Internet (62%), party headquarters or some party activity (44%) and the Chamber (40%) were the most common ones.

Moving forward


· *Need to make visible and to recognize the problem*

Initially, 73% of those interviewed said they had experienced political violence due to their gender – interestingly, this percentage increased to 82% after being asked about specific manifestations. This difference of almost ten percentage points indicates certain degree of naturalization of the problem, even among those mainly affected. Therefore, moving forward, it is critical to produce information and statistics on political violence against women periodically as an input both for designing awareness-raising campaigns as well as for formulating public policies.

· *The importance of raising-awareness and generating enabling conditions for exercising politics*

The evidence points to differences in legislators' perceptions about the obstacles that women face in politics in general and the acknowledgment of those types of limitations in their own experiences. In that sense, while 82% consider that women politicians are disqualified for their clothes, less than half (38%) indicated that "if I use the clothes I like I would be discriminated against". Something similar happens with the lack of family support: even though 67% mentioned the lack of family support as one of the main obstacles to women getting involved in politics, only 29% of those interviewed noted that their partners/spouses complain about the limited time spent together and 51% that their daughters and/or sons complain likewise.

These results point towards two key challenges: on the one hand, the need to raise awareness and build capacities among politicians to recognize the different forms of violence that can occur throughout women's political trajectories; on the other, the need for policies that not only address issues of time, infrastructure and services available for care, but also question cultural patterns and mandates about care as an exclusive responsibility of women



· Intersecting inequalities and the need for an intersectional approach

When asked to identify the moment in their trajectory when they experienced a greater number of episodes of political violence, 44% mentioned as elected officers, 38% during their political activism/militancy and 15% while they were candidates. The high percentage of women that perceive violence during their militant years evidences the need for an intersectional approach that addresses the way in which different inequalities intersect.

These findings point towards the importance of preventing violence against women at the outset of their political trajectories, as well as broadening the empirical evidence on political violence against women in politics in order to include not only women in public office, but also those that find themselves at the initial stages of their political careers. Political parties in particular should feel called upon to eradicate practices that feed a political culture that discriminates and implicitly enables manifestations of violence against women.

· Going beyond normative changes: towards a holistic and multi-actor approach

In addition to normative changes, women legislators stressed the need for a holistic approach that includes measures such as “organizing media campaigns to raise awareness” (84%), “generating spaces to strengthen networks of women in politics” (76%) and “having public organizations where to make complaints and seek advice” (62%).

Legislators, acknowledging the complexities and multi-causality of violence against women in politics, point to the need for joint and coordinated efforts of multiple actors to address the problem, underscoring the role of political parties (78%), women’s organizations (73%), the media (73%) and the Congress (64%).

