

RESEARCH REPORT

Technology-facilitated gender-based violence against women in politics in Brazil



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About Data-Pop Alliance



Data-Pop Alliance (DPA) is a global non-profit think-and-do tank created in 2013 by the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative (HHI), MIT Media Lab, and ODI Global (previously known as the Overseas Development Institute). Its mission is to promote positive social change using artificial intelligence (AI) and data through three pillars of work: diagnosing development challenges with new data and methods, mobilising actors and communities around evidence-driven narratives and transforming systems and policies to foster human agency and social justice. Since its founding, DPA has carried out over 150 projects across more than 40 countries, working at the intersection of data, technology, gender and human rights in collaboration with UN agencies, governments, civil society and the private sector. Guided by a commitment to equity and inclusion, DPA seeks to harness data and technology to address structural inequalities and empower individuals and communities worldwide.

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Trigger warning: Please note that this report contains explicit examples of misogynistic, racist, xenophobic and transphobic violence, including calls for sexual and physical violence. This study does not censor these examples because it is important to demonstrate how violent attacks against women in politics manifest in digital spaces, how this political violence spreads across social media in sexist forms, and how it can be identified.

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Key findings

- **Technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TF-GBV) is enabled by deep-rooted gender norms.** Distinct attack patterns are linked to prevailing gender norms that intersect with the diverse identities of women in politics. Black women face racialised abuse that mixes misogyny with racism; Indigenous women are targeted by colonial narratives; trans women experience compounded violence rooted in norms around gender conformity and sexuality; and white women are often policed via ageism. All women in politics are attacked based on gender norms that link femininity to domesticity, emotionality and purity and on questions that target women's independence and that intersect with racial/class hierarchies.
- **Online attacks rise with visibility through a politician's term as well as during election periods.** Intensity of attacks increase with visibility, generating a 'visibility penalty' when women politicians hold high-profile positions, engage in polarising policy debates, clash with prominent figures, and participate in high-visibility events. While election periods do not emerge as the primary drivers of online aggression overall, they are still significant.
- **Politically motivated actors coordinate attacks using misogynistic, racialised and sexualised tropes.** These actors, often belonging to far-right ecosystems, weaponise gendered social tensions and scale them via social media platforms. Similarly, attacks can come from within a woman's own political party. In particular, right-wing women are often targeted by their own ideological allies as a form of institutional gatekeeping and exclusion.
- **TF-GBV generates layers of cascading harm in real life.** From the strains on mental health to threats against family members, to relocation/security costs and health crises, these harms compound existing gender inequalities – both in resources and support, and work to entrench exclusionary barriers that push women out of politics.
- **Critical threat to democracy.** TF-GBV does not only harm individual women; it works as a tactic to deter, punish and expel women from public life. When certain voices are systematically silenced online, representation, plural debate and accountability shrink, thus threatening democracy. Tackling TF-GBV is therefore not just a women's safety issue, but about strengthening democracy, and requires immediate remedies as well as longer-term norm and institutional change.
- **Underdeveloped conceptualisation of TF-GBV across parties.** Among the 20 parties examined, no specific strategy, manifesto or policy document was identified that addresses TF-GBV specifically. As a result, no significant differences across party lines were found.
- **Ill-fitting analogue solutions for a digital world.** Party measures are reactive, fragmented and under-resourced, with few formal protocols. Digital abuse is still treated as a private issue, not a democratic one. Similarly, laws and enforcement are lagging behind, courts are slow, and abuse is being fuelled by weak platform regulation and AI-driven amplification. In many municipalities, isolation inside male-dominated chambers worsens the risks. Overall, current measures function as 'analogue solutions for a digital world' and are ill-suited to address the ways in which social media platforms amplify gendered attacks.

Executive summary

Technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TF-GBV) in politics has emerged as a critical threat to democracy in Brazil. This mixed-methods study examines how TF-GBV affects the country's women politicians across different identities and political affiliations. It analyses political parties' understanding and responses to this phenomenon, with a particular focus on how prevailing gender norms shape both the attacks and institutional responses. The study is, therefore, guided by two core research questions:

- How and when does TF-GBV affect different subgroups of women in politics?
- How do gender norms and structural factors shape political parties' responses to TF-GBV?

The study is based on our analysis of over 6,000 Telegram messages (of which 1,165 were classified as attacks) from public political, conspiracy and neo-Nazi groups in Brazil; interviews with 28 women politicians and party leaders from 13 parties across the political spectrum; and a review of official party websites and documents known as *estatutos*. The analytical lens we adopt integrates gender norms and intersectionality and reveals the complex intersectional dynamics of digital violence and institutional gender gaps, which hamper attempts to address it.

Mechanisms of TF-GBV in politics: how intersecting identities and visibility shape experiences

While all women politicians are subject to baseline gender-based attacks, the intensity and form of these attacks are inevitably shaped by their race, ethnicity and gender identity. Black women, for example, face racialised abuse, while Indigenous women are targeted with colonial stereotypes, and trans women experience compounded violence that combines misogyny, transphobia, and sometimes racism. Across all groups, appearance-based attacks and moral judgements are common, though they manifest differently depending on racial and political lines, with white women targeted more frequently through aesthetic critiques and moral policing.

In addition, women are often targeted with norms-based messages that reinforce traditional gender roles, such as being told to 'go wash the dishes'. Such messages frame their political participation as a violation of their 'proper place' in society. They also 'police' the gender order through ridicule and moral judgement, often questioning women's independence and implying that their success depends on men rather than their own merit.

Political affiliation can operate both as a shield and a target, given that politically motivated stakeholders weaponise TF-GBV across the political spectrum, with intra-party attacks often functioning as institutional gatekeeping mechanisms. Women politicians report personal data leaks from within their own political allies, as well as deliberate undermining by male colleagues, and exclusion tactics that reinforce patriarchal control within party structures. They may also face cross-ideological attacks when their positions conflict with expectations of ideological 'purity', as seen in left-wing attacks against centrist figures. That being said, right-wing women are also in a difficult situation, as they can face substantial and violent attacks from their own ideological allies, demonstrating internal fractures and scapegoating dynamics within conservative networks.

In Brazil's polarised context, these patterns show that TF-GBV is deeply entangled with struggles over political power and representation. For left-wing women, online violence functions as a tool of ideological warfare that aims to delegitimise progressive agendas in the public sphere. For right-wing women, it is a gatekeeping mechanism that disciplines those who challenge male-dominated hierarchies within conservative structures. Together, these dynamics show that political polarisation does not merely amplify the volume of attacks but reconfigures their entire logic, shaping the perpetrators of the abuse, the platforms they use, and the narratives through which TF-GBV is deployed.

The visibility of women politicians sparks the majority of attacks against them – during but also beyond election campaign periods. The harassment intensifies when they hold high-profile positions, engage in polarising policies, clash with prominent figures, or participate in public events. Insights from both Telegram data and interviewees show that TF-GBV is driven less by electoral timing than by political relevance, with visibility acting as the primary catalyst for sustained and orchestrated aggression, particularly when women deviate from gendered expectations to occupy the public sphere.

Parties' and institutional responses to TF-GBV: from knowledge gaps to insufficient responses

The study finds that political ideology shapes how parties understand gender inequalities. Left-leaning parties tend to use structural analyses that emphasise patriarchy and intersectionality, while right-leaning parties more often see inequalities as being the result of 'societal *machismo*' and, occasionally, biology. Yet both camps struggle to grasp how digital platforms reshape violence, often conflating online and offline dynamics.

The conceptualisation of TF-GBV remains underdeveloped across all 20 of the political parties examined, and the study identified no specific strategy, manifesto or policy document that addresses TF-GBV specifically. Parties acknowledge the broad impact of gender inequalities and GBV on women in society and, in some cases, within their own political parties, but fail to conceptualize TF-GBV as a specific phenomenon. While interviewees link TF-GBV to coordinated online networks, they lack a full understanding of how technology reshapes violence – whether online or offline – and often underestimate how digital platforms magnify gendered moral policing and norm enforcement.

Existing mechanisms to address political GBV and TF-GBV are still insufficient, as party responses remain reactive, fragmented and limited to severe cases, and often lack formal protocols or preventive strategies. Resource constraints and inadequate infrastructure also leave many women feeling abandoned, with digital violence treated as a personal rather than democratic issue. Current measures amount to 'analogue solutions for a digital world' and are unable to address the continuum of GBV and the distinct dynamics of online amplification and coordination.

TF-GBV is a threat to democracy

Building on the Framework of Information Disorder (Ricard et al., 2025), the study argues that social norms operate as enabling factors for TF-GBV, with dangerous implications for democracy. Indeed, multilayered impacts of TF-GBV across all identities and the entire political spectrum reveal cascading personal and political consequences, to the point of discouraging women's participation in politics, with leaving or avoiding office altogether.

We conceptualise a mechanism chain with four main components, starting with (1) the existence of enabling social norms. These are weaponised by (2) motivated actors (e.g., political opponents, partisan media, far-right networks, anonymous users) to craft (3) gendered and racialised narratives

(e.g., sexualisation, questioning competence), and then disseminated and amplified using (4) platform affordances¹ and algorithms (e.g., hashtags, recommender systems).

This research provides theoretical insights to contribute to an understanding of TF-GBV as a systematic threat to democratic participation. The findings have implications beyond Brazil, offering a model for the analysis of how digital technologies amplify and organise TF-GBV in politics in polarised democratic contexts worldwide.

Recommendations

The study concludes that addressing TF-GBV requires an explicit understanding of it as part of a broader continuum of GBV that is embedded in patriarchal, racist, and classist social structures. As one participant observed, ‘all political violence in Brazil begins with gender-based political violence, because it is rooted in entrenched *machismo*, historical misogyny and impunity’. Effective responses must, therefore, tackle not only the technological dimensions of violence but the fundamental gender inequalities that enable and sustain it. This means that breaking the TF-GBV cycle requires comprehensive, multi-actor responses that address both immediate protection needs and underlying structural inequalities.

Despite persistent challenges, Brazil has made notable legislative progress on violence against women in politics (VAWIP) and online gender-based violence. Key developments include the Law to Combat Political Violence Against Women (Law 14.192/2021), the first legal framework protecting women candidates and officeholders. They also include a series of laws to address digital violence, such as the Carolina Dieckmann Law (2012), the Lola Aronovich Law (2018), and a 2025 amendment to the Maria da Penha Law, which extends protections to electronic violence. However, these frameworks remain fragmented and lack a unified definition of TF-GBV, which creates implementation challenges and legal gaps in prevention and redress.

The report proposes a coordinated set of recommendations across parties, public institutions, tech platforms, and civil society. In the short-term, the recommendations include party protocols that combine legal, psychosocial, security, and platform-facing measures; monitoring and rapid-response capacity; platform accountability to disrupt coordinated TF-GBV; and digital safety/strategic media training for women in politics. Over the next 1–3 years, the priorities should be to tighten legal sanctions and protection pathways, extend measures to municipal levels (e.g., women’s prosecutors’ offices in city councils) and promote equitable social norms across society. These actions are mutually reinforcing, pairing immediate remedies with structural and cultural change to reduce VAWIP/TF-GBV and strengthen democratic participation.

¹ These are the inherent capabilities and opportunities that a platform provides to its users. They shape the way in which users interact with the technology and each other.

Key terms

Doxxing: The malicious practice of publicly revealing someone's private or identifying information (e.g., address, phone number, workplace) online without their consent, often with the intent to enable harassment or threats. It is considered a form of technology-facilitated violence and is increasingly criminalised across jurisdictions.

Estatuto: A party's *estatuto* is the official set of internal rules that governs its organisation. It defines the party's objectives, structure, membership criteria, the rights and duties of members, and decision-making procedures.

Intersectionality: A framework for the analysis of how multiple and overlapping identities (e.g., gender, race, class, sexuality, disability, migration status) combine to create unique experiences of discrimination and privilege (Crenshaw, 1989). In feminist and human rights practice, intersectionality emphasises that women are not a homogenous group and that social inequalities must be addressed in their interconnected forms.

Machismo: A cultural ideology and set of behaviours rooted in patriarchal structures that emphasise male dominance and the devaluation of women. *Machismo* normalises gender inequality and is associated with practices that range from everyday sexism to physical violence. In Latin America, it is widely recognised as a driver of gender-based violence and political exclusion.

Pardos: Refers to individuals of mixed racial backgrounds, typically with African, European and/or Indigenous ancestry. It represents a broad and heterogeneous category within the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) classification.

Preto: Refers to individuals who identify as Black or as of predominantly African descent. The term denotes people with darker skin tones and African ancestry and is one of the official racial categories used by the IBGE.

Technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TF-GBV): There are multiple definitions, typologies and conceptual frameworks related to TF-GBV, developed both by academics and practitioners (including ICFJ, ICRW, UNESCO, UNFPA²). This report adopts the definition of TF-GBV as 'an act of violence perpetrated by one or more individuals that is committed, assisted, aggravated or amplified, in part or entirely, through the use of information and communication technologies or digital media against a person on the basis of gender' (UNFPA, 2023).

TRE-SP: *Tribunal Regional Eleitoral de São Paulo* (Regional Electoral Court of São Paulo). This judicial body oversees electoral processes in the state, including candidate registration, election monitoring and the adjudication of electoral disputes.

Violence against women in politics (VAWIP): There is no single global definition, but UN Women describes it as acts or threats of physical, sexual or psychological violence that prevent women from exercising and realising their political rights (UN Women, 2021). One prominent definition used in the field defines violence against women in politics as distinct acts of aggression, coercion or intimidation directed at women that aim to restrict their political participation, uphold gender hierarchies and undermine democracy, human rights and gender equality (Krook and Sanín, 2016a).

² International Center for Journalists; International Center for Research on Women; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization; United Nations Population Fund.

Acronyms

CSOs	Civil society organisations
dRPC	development Research and Projects Centre
FID	Framework of Information Disorder
GBV	Gender-based violence
LGBTQI+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, intersex. The 'plus' sign acknowledges individuals who describe their gender or sexuality with identities beyond those explicitly listed.
PCdoB	' <i>Partido Comunista do Brasil</i> ' (Communist Party of Brazil) - left-wing
PDT	' <i>Partido Democrático Trabalhista</i> ' (Democratic Labour Party) - left wing
PL	' <i>Partido Liberal</i> ' (Liberal Party) - right-wing
PP	' <i>Partido Progressistas</i> ' (Progressive Party) - centre- right
PRD	' <i>Partido Renovação Democrática</i> ' (Party of Democratic Renewal) - right-wing
PSB	' <i>Partido Socialista Brasileiro</i> ' (Brazilian Socialist Party) - left-wing
PSD	' <i>Partido Social Democrático</i> ' (Social Democratic Party) - centre right
PSDB	' <i>Partido da Social Democracia Brasileira</i> ' (Brazilian Social Democracy Party) - centre right
PSOL	' <i>Partido Socialismo e Liberdade</i> ' (Socialism and Liberty Party) - left-wing
PT	' <i>Partido dos Trabalhadores</i> ' (Workers Party) - left-wing
PV	' <i>Partido Verde</i> ' (Green Party) - left-wing
Rede	' <i>Rede Sustentabilidade</i> ' (Sustainability Network Party) - left-wing
TF-GBV	Technology-facilitated gender-based violence
TRE	' <i>Tribunais Regionais Eleitorais</i> ' (Regional Electoral Courts)
TSE	' <i>Tribunal Superior Eleitoral</i> ' (Superior Electoral Court)
VAWIP	Violence against women in politics

1 Introduction

Overview

Technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TF-GBV) is on the rise worldwide and is targeting women in public life, including politics (Jankowicz et al., 2024). In Brazil, online misogyny and coordinated attacks have intensified during the country's recent electoral cycles, with documented evidence of high volumes of misogynistic, racist and transphobic abuse toward women candidates (INTERNETLAB et al., 2025). During the most recent election cycle, an analysis of comments posted during and after the 2024 TV Band (town hall) debates on YouTube across six state capitals found women, particularly trans women and younger candidates, subjected to more aggressive and delegitimising content than men (Coelho, 2024).

Digital attacks against women occur within Brazil's broader context of pervasive violence against women in politics (VAWIP), which hinders their political participation and erodes the conditions that would enable them to take action (Pinho, 2025). This manifests itself for example in women's underrepresentation in legislative bodies, with only 18.1% and 19.8% of members of the national congress and chamber of deputies respectively being women (IPU, 2025). For example, all female candidates in the 2020 municipal elections experienced more than one type of political violence, with 60% reporting insults, humiliation or offensive attacks that were linked specifically to their political participation (Instituto Marielle Franco, 2023).

The tragic assassination of Marielle Franco, a Black, lesbian, left-wing city councillor in 2018, is one example of extreme forms of VAWIP in recent years. Sadly, it is not surprising, given Brazil's persistently high rates of femicide and widespread violence against women, particularly against Black women (IBGE, 2024), with this broader violence also found in the political arena.

It is important to note that, overall, most political violence in Brazil targets men (Borba et al., 2022). However, studies suggest that TF-GBV within political spaces has a distinct and disproportionate impact on women's participation and representation. While male politicians tend to be targeted because of their political positions or affiliations, female politicians are subjected more frequently to harassment and abuse on the basis of their gender (Koch et al., 2025; Southern, 2024; Mantilla, 2013).

Acknowledging this context, the goal of this study is not to estimate prevalence, but to provide a qualitative examination of the mechanisms and implications of TF-GBV for women in politics for Brazil's democracy as a whole. The country has one of the lowest rates of female parliamentary representation in Latin America, with women holding just 18.1% of seats in the Chamber of Deputies as of December 2024 – well below the South America average of 32.4% (IPU, n.d). There is, therefore, an argument to be made regarding TF-GBV in politics as a threat to democracy.

Legislative landscape in Brazil

Despite the ongoing challenges, Brazil has developed a robust set of legal frameworks to address different dimensions of VAWIP and online violence. A landmark achievement has been the Law to Combat Political Violence Against Women (Law No. 14.192/2021), the country's first dedicated legislation for the protection of women candidates and elected officials and a major step towards safeguarding women's political participation. The Law not only defines political violence against women but also recognises its intersection with racial discrimination, mandates gender parity in electoral debates, and establishes penalties for the dissemination of false or discriminatory content during campaigns.

Brazil has also enacted several important laws over the past decade to tackle digital violence. The Carolina Dieckmann Law (Law No. 12.737/2012), for example, criminalises unauthorised access to electronic devices, while the Lola Aronovich Law (Law No. 13.642/2018) grants the Federal Police authority to investigate the online spread of misogynistic content. More recently, in October 2025, the Constitution and Justice Commission approved an amendment to the Maria da Penha Law (the country's main legal instrument to address domestic violence) to include forms of electronic violence, such as digital stalking (Agência Senado, 2025).

These legal instruments are, however, fragmented and lack integration, and none provide a comprehensive definition of TF-GBV. This absence of a unified legal framework creates critical loopholes that hinder effective prevention, protection and prosecution efforts to combat TF-GBV, particularly against women in politics.

There are also significant implementation gaps. An evaluation of Law to Combat Political Violence Against Women found that only 12 cases had progressed to electoral criminal proceedings; 8 remained pending judgement, 2 were conditionally suspended, and only 2 resulted in convictions (Agência Câmara, 2024).

Role of political parties

Literature shows that the perpetrators of TF-GBV include a wide constellation of actors, including political opponents, online extremist groups, anonymous social media users, journalists, and state-linked actors who use digital platforms to silence or discredit women in public life (Bardall et al., 2020). Political parties emerge both as frequent enablers of abuse and, at the same time, as vital actors in efforts to address it, through codes of conduct, internal sanctions and protection protocols (Krook and Sanin, 2016a). They play a key role in women's electoral visibility (Gatto and Thome, 2020) as they shape candidate selection and control campaign resources (Kunovich and Paxton, 2005; Phillips, 2022). As such, they can prevent and address TF-GBV in politics, not only to ensure electoral viability but also the ability of elected women to participate fully in public life. Focusing on party-level dynamics allows this study to assess organizational responses and identify reform levers to strengthen accountability, create safer environments, and broaden inclusive participation.

Closing the knowledge gaps

There remains a gap in research on how political parties understand and address TF-GBV in politics. Overall, despite a growing focus on TF-GBV in politics, there are still profound knowledge gaps on this issue, particularly beyond the Global North. Research on TF-GBV in the Global South and on the intersectionally disaggregated experiences of Black, Indigenous, older, younger, and LGBTQI+ women, remains sparse (Southern, 2024; Meriläinen, 2024; van der Vegt, 2024; Fuchs and Schäfer, 2021; Erikson et al., 2023). We address the knowledge gaps through two core questions:

- How and when does TF-GBV affect different subgroups of women in politics in Brazil?
- How do gender norms and structural factors shape political parties' responses to TF-GBV?

The study adopts the UNFPA definition of TF-GBV as 'an act of violence ... committed, assisted, aggravated, or amplified ... through ICTs or digital media against a person on the basis of gender' (UNFPA, 2023), encompassing more than 40 forms of abuse such as online harassment, cyberstalking, doxxing, image-based abuse, and hate speech (UNFPA, 2025).

Our analytical lens integrates gender norms and intersectionality. Gender norms are socially shared expectations about ‘appropriate’ roles and traits that shape behaviour and power relations (Lovenduski, 1998; Marcus and Harper, 2014). In political life, these norms construct leadership as inherently masculine and structure access to parties, candidacies and office, reproducing gendered hierarchies (Krook and Sanín, 2016a). Intersecting identities (race/ethnicity, class, age, sexuality, gender identity) do not merely add risk: they reshape the ways in which harm is produced and policed (Crenshaw, 1991; Kuperberg, 2018).

The impact can be seen in Brazil, where gender norms intersect with structural racism to produce distinct forms of hate and discredit, particularly against Black and Indigenous women who are targeted simultaneously by both misogynistic and racist/colonialist narratives that question their legitimacy in public life (Carneiro, 2005; Instituto Marielle Franco, 2021). More broadly, online harassment is also patterned by hierarchies of race, gender, and sexuality (Valente, 2023).

Building on the Framework of Information Disorder (FID) (Ricard et al., 2025), we conceptualise a mechanism chain in which enabling social norms are: weaponised by motivated actors (e.g., political opponents, partisan media, far-right networks, anonymous users); disseminated through gendered and racialised narratives and tactics (e.g., sexualisation, questioning competence); and amplified by platform affordances and algorithms (e.g., hashtags, recommender systems). The downstream outcomes include ‘chilled speech’³, candidate attrition, skewed representation and the erosion of public trust (OSCE/ODIHR, 2022; Rheault et al., 2019; Johnson, 2020; Teele et al., 2018).

Although rooted in the Brazilian context, this study aims to contribute to global debates on TF-GBV by offering evidence and identifying practices that can inform political parties and policy-makers worldwide in their efforts to foster safer and more inclusive political environments. The study was undertaken as part of a collaborative, cross-country research initiative. The development Research and Projects Centre (dRPC), a Nigeria-based non-profit organisation that focuses on development and humanitarian challenges, conducted the same study in Nigeria to enable comparative insights and shared learning across both contexts (dRCP, 2025).

The report is structured in five sections, as follows. Sections 1 and 2 introduce the context, goals and methodology of the study. Section 3 analyses the mechanisms and impacts of TF-GBV, showing how targeted attacks are shaped by intersecting identities, how political visibility drives sustained harassment beyond electoral cycles, and how women use diverse coping strategies. Section 4 examines institutional and political party responses to TF-GBV to reveal conceptual ambiguities, fragmented measures, and legislative and sociopolitical barriers. Section 5 offers recommendations for political parties and other stakeholders to address both the manifestations and structural roots of TF-GBV in Brazilian politics. And finally, Section 6 summarizes the report.

³ ‘Chilled speech’ refers to the inhibition of free expression because of fears of legal repercussions, often described through the concept of the ‘chilling effect’. More broadly, it may refer to using restrained speech to avoid aggressive responses.

2 Methodology

2.1 A mixed-methods approach

Building on established case study research principles (Yin, 2018), this study employed a mixed-methods triangulation approach to enhance the robustness of its findings. Data came from three complementary sources, summarised in Table 1 below: messages from Telegram political communities; semi-structured interviews with women politicians and party leaders; and documentary materials, including official party documents and websites. A more detailed description of each data source is provided in Annex A.

Table 1 Data collection by subgroup: Telegram, interviews, and party documents

	Parties represented in interview sample*	Women in politics				Parties		
		Interviews		Telegram analysis		Interviews		Document Review**
		Sub-groups	#	# manually analysed	# attacks	Parties	# of Interviews	
Left and centre-left	PT, PSOL, PSB, Rede, PCdoB, PV***	White women	4	1337	298 attacks	PT, PSOL, PSB, Rede, PCdoB, PV	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Estatutos: 7/7 • Party official websites: 7/7
		Non-white women	5	1197	309 attacks			
Right and centre-right	Cidadania, Novo, PL, Podemos, PRD, Republicano, União Brasil	White women	4	3592	557 attacks	PL, Novo, União Brasil, PRD, Cidadania, Podemos	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Estatutos: 13/13 • Party official websites: 13/13
		Non-white women	2	300	1 attack			

* All parties represented in the sample of interviews (both with women in politics and party leaders)

** All parties currently represented in the Chamber of Deputies were included in the document review

*** See acronyms list for full names of abbreviated political parties.

Telegram data allows for both quantitative and qualitative analysis, revealing not only the volume, but also the gendered narratives and stereotypes mobilised to discredit or silence women. This is critical for an understanding of how harmful gender norms are reproduced, amplified and mainstreamed in political discourse (Sportelli and D'Errico, 2025; Ging, 2017; Krook, 2018).

Interviews provide nuanced insight into how these attacks are experienced, accounting for intersecting identities that may heighten (or sometimes mitigate) vulnerability. They illuminate the personal, professional and political repercussions of TF-GBV and offer critical evidence of how gender norms shape both experiences and responses. In particular, interviews with party leaders shed light on how parties interpret TF-GBV, the extent to which internal culture and norms influence their responses, and areas where institutional barriers persist. This is crucial for linking women's lived experiences to the organisational logics and gendered power relations within political parties.

Finally, document analysis enables an assessment of whether, and how, TF-GBV is formally acknowledged and addressed within party policies. This step is particularly important to reinforce

the insights from interviews, given that most research is shaped by evidence from the Global North. In addition, comparing these documents with interview findings helps to reveal gaps between formal commitments and informal institutions and expose areas where gender norms may undermine or reinforce institutional responses.

Together, these data sources create a multi-layered understanding that connects discourse, lived experience, and institutional responses. This approach is summarised in Table 1, which presents the number of attacks identified on Telegram, the interviews conducted and the parties represented, as well as the *estatutos* (legal statutes of the parties) and websites reviewed.

The methodology, ethical standards and scope were reviewed and approved by two Institutional Review Boards: ODI Global's board and Plataforma Brasil (decision approval number 7.566.576).

2.2 Party classifications

This study adopted a comprehensive approach to party selection and ideological classification, encompassing the full spectrum of Brazil's political landscape. Interviews were conducted with women elected politicians and party leaders from a total of 13 parties as follows:

- six left-leaning parties: *Partido Comunista do Brasil* (PCdoB); *Partido Socialista Brasileiro* (PSB); *Partido Socialismo e Liberdade* (PSOL); *Partido dos Trabalhadores* (PT); *Partido Verde* (PV) and *Rede Sustentabilidade* (Rede), and
- seven right-leaning parties: *Cidadania, Novo*; *Partido Liberal* (PL); *Podemos*; *Partido Renovação Democrática* (PRD), *Republicanos* and *União Brasil*.

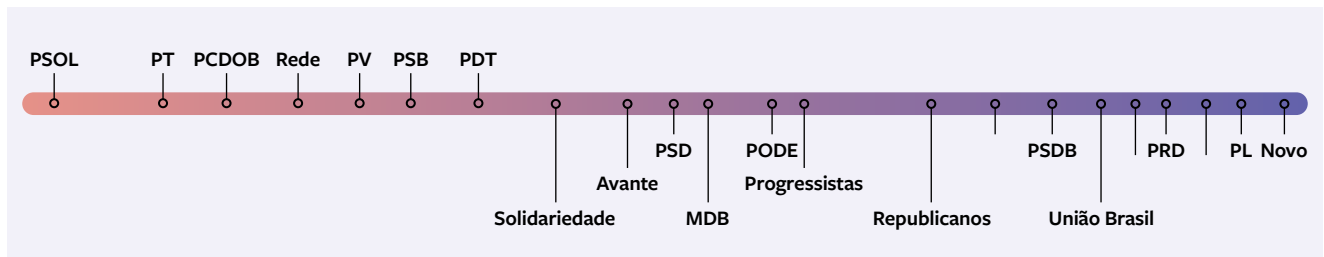
The document review expanded coverage to all parties with congressional seats (20 in total): 7 on the left/centre-left and 13 on the right/centre-right.

The country's party system combines historical continuity with recent political reconfiguration. For example, the oldest active party is the *Partido Comunista do Brasil* (PCdoB), founded in 1922, while the newest, *Partido da Renovação Democrática* (PRD) and *União Brasil*, were both established in 2022. Electoral performance – rather than the age of the party – is the key determinant and proxy of party influence within the country's democratic system (Kinzo, 2004). Indeed, public financing and electoral funds depend on congressional performance, which is why the study prioritised parties with seats.

Based on their access to electoral funds, the two biggest parties in Brazil today are PL: a right-wing party with a monthly budget of approximately R\$16.1 million (around \$3 million) and PT: a left-wing party with a monthly budget of approximately R\$12.1 million (around \$2.3 million). Medium-size parties, with monthly budgets ranging from R\$3 million to R\$10 million include *União Brasil*, *Partido Progressistas* (PP), *Republicanos*, *Movimento Democrático Brasileiro* (MDB), *Partido Social Democrático* (PSD), *Podemos* (on the right-wing) and PSB, PSOL and *Partido Democrático Trabalhista* (PDT) on the left wing. There are also multiple small-size parties with (monthly budgets under R\$3M), including *Partido da Social Democracia Brasileira* (PSDB), PRD, *Solidariedade*, *Avante*, PCdoB, *Cidadania* (smallest on the right), *Rede* and PV (smallest on the left).

The ideological classification used throughout the study (Figure 1) was derived from *Folha de São Paulo*'s 'GPS partidário' political positioning tool (Mariani et al., 2024). Parties categorised as centrist by the *GPS partidário* were grouped with the 'centre-right and right' category, reflecting their current ideological proximity to centre-right rather than centre-left positions. This methodological decision recognises the fluid nature of party positioning in Brazil, which shifts in response to contemporary political alliances and voting behaviour, seeking to capture the most accurate representation of the political landscape at the time of study (Bolognesi et al., 2023).

Figure 1 Party classification according to GPS partidário



Source: Elaborated by the authors, based on Folha de São Paulo's 'GPS partidário' (Mariani et al., 2024)

2.3 Race and ethnicity as categorised by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE)

The race and ethnicity categories used for official statistics and public policies are self-declared. The Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) considers the following to be self-declared categories: white, Black, *pardo* (brown), 'yellow' (Asian), and Indigenous (IBGE, 2025). A substantial body of scholarship consolidates these into the broader categories of 'white' (*branco*) and 'non-white' (Black, brown, yellow, and Indigenous) to capture the deep structural racial divide that shapes access to power and resources (Bueno and Dunning, 2017).

According to the 2022 IBGE census, 45.3% of Brazilians self-identify as *pardo* (brown), 10.2% as Black, 0.6% as Indigenous, and 0.4% as 'yellow' (Belandi and Gomes, 2023). In other words, over half of the population identifies as Black or as of mixed Black descent (*preto + pardo*), while smaller proportions identify as Indigenous or Asian. The rest of Brazil's population (43.5%) identifies as white.

Political representation, however, does not mirror this racial and ethnic diversity. In the 2022 cycle in the Chamber of Deputies, only 26% of deputies identified as Black (*preto ou pardo*), i.e. 134 deputies out of 512 (Agência Câmara, 2022). Given such representational disparity, the report addresses race as a key analytical dimension. The pronounced gap between Brazil's racial demographics and the composition of its elected officials underscores how racial inequalities continue to shape access to political power and visibility in public life. Understanding this gap is crucial for an understanding of the broader mechanisms of exclusion, marginalisation and voice that the study seeks to analyse.

Adopting the 'white'/'non-white' distinction in this study underscores the historical and ongoing exclusion of non-white Brazilians from formal political spaces. The term 'non-white' is used to protect participants' anonymity, particularly in contexts where racial identification could compromise recognition. At times, however, this report uses the term 'Black' to refer collectively to *pardos* and *pretos* in line with the official racial classification of *Estatuto da Igualdade Racial* (Senado Federal, 2021). In the Brazilian context, both categories designate Afro-descendant populations. The terms 'Black' and 'Indigenous' are used in this report only when relevant to highlight intersectional dimensions of political violence and when doing so does not risk identifying specific individuals.

2.4 TF-GBV classification

Using an abductive approach, drawing on existing literature and grey studies that classify TF-GBV. In collaboration with dRPC, a typology was developed to classify social media attacks into six categories as follows:

- **Identity-based attacks:** these are messages that target an individual's race, ethnicity, nationality, social class, disability, LGBTQI+ identity, age, or religion. Such attacks often include racist, xenophobic, ableist or religiously intolerant language, and leverage intersecting social hierarchies and dominant norms to craft sensationalist content.
- **Gender-stereotype-based attacks:** these are messages that invoke misogynistic and sexist clichés or double standards, such as accusing women of being bad mothers, neglecting family responsibilities, or exploiting their sexuality for political gain. Such attacks leverage traditional gender norms about femininity, sexuality and domestic roles in ways that police women's behaviour, to the point of punishing them for transgressing these expectations by seeking or exercising political power.
- **Attacks against appearance and personality:** these are messages criticising a woman's physical appearance, clothing or behaviour, including labels such as 'too emotional', 'too aggressive', 'unattractive', or 'dressing inappropriately'. These attacks use shaming tactics to humiliate women and reinforce 'acceptable' standards of femininity.
- **Attacks against moral judgement:** these are messages that question an individual's integrity, honesty or ethical fitness for office, often labelling them as 'untrustworthy,' 'corrupt,' 'opportunist' or morally compromised. Such attacks often associate the individual with corruption or unethical behaviour to undermine their legitimacy and credibility. When directed at women, they often draw on gendered notions of morality and respectability to intensify these accusations.
- **Attacks against competence and capacity to govern:** these are messages that target an individual's suitability for governing, using labels such as 'incompetent', 'inexperienced' and 'unqualified', or using derogatory terms such as 'stupid' or 'puppet'. When directed at women, such attacks are rooted in gendered stereotypes that depict women as inherently less capable, rational or authoritative than men and often insinuate that their achievements are the result of male patronage.
- **Attacks against policies, political and ideological alignment:** these are messages that target an individual's party, ideology or policy positions, often attacking their political affiliations or their support for specific causes such as feminism or abortion rights. These attacks often frame advocacy for gender equality, reproductive rights or feminist policies as threats to the traditional gender order, delegitimizing women's agendas and discouraging progressive change.
- **Other/unspecified:** these are messages that do not fall within the categories shown above. They include those that incite physical violence (e.g., calls to harm or kill the target), attacks conveyed through emojis, and other uncategorised forms of abuse.

A total of 6,426 messages were analysed manually, from which 1,165 messages were classified as 'attacks' and coded into these non-exclusive categories. The findings based on this categorisation are presented in the following section.

2.5 Theoretical approach: from social norms to undermining democracy

This study adopts an intersectional gender lens to examine the structural and social norms that shape both experiences of and responses to TF-GBV. Gender norms are understood as socially shared expectations that define appropriate roles, behaviours and attributes for women and men, and that shape both power relations and access to political spaces (Lovenduski, 1998; Marcus and Harper, 2014). Intersecting identities, including race/ethnicity, class, age, sexuality, gender identity, and political affiliation, not only increase vulnerability but qualitatively reshape the way in which these inequalities unfold (Crenshaw, 1991; Kuperberg, 2018).

In political contexts, gender norms often construct leadership as inherently masculine, positioning women as 'exceptions' whose legitimacy is a matter of continuous negotiation (Krook and Sanín, 2016b). This expectation is reproduced through formal institutions, like political party rules and candidate selection, as well as informal practices and networks that reinforce male dominance in political representation (Bjarnegård and Kenny, 2015; Sanjaume-Calvet et al., 2023). This dynamic both constrains women's access to leadership and heightens scrutiny and sanction when they defy patriarchal expectations.

As noted, this study builds on the FID (Ricard et al., 2025), which offers a structure to explain the mechanisms and implications of information disorder (including disinformation, hate speech, online violence, etc.) for policy and democracy, and spans its emergence, propagation, the actors involved and its real-world impacts. Within this structure, the study approaches social norms as enabling factors for TF-GBV, which are weaponised by motivated agents who perpetuate gendered attacks that damage the information ecosystem and, ultimately, democracy.

Digital attacks against women politicians through insults, harassment or disinformation often reproduce misogynistic narratives that frame women as unfit to govern, morally corrupt or undeserving of public voice (OSCE/ODIHR, 2022; Rheault et al., 2019). They often leverage norms that associate femininity with emotionality, domesticity and moral purity, while promoting traits linked to masculinity, such as assertiveness and rationality (Johnson, 2020; Teele et al., 2018).

Intersectionality also provides a lens for the examination of how language and tactics mobilise historical power structures that produce distinct patterns of harm. In Brazil, online harassment is found to be deeply structured by social hierarchies of race, gender and sexuality (Valente, 2023).

These stereotypes shape both voter perceptions and party cultures, influencing recruitment, promotion and support for women candidates (Rohrbach, 2025; Ditonto, 2017). Far from being random, the framing of attacks reflects ideological and electoral incentives. Prior work identifies actors across many levels (individual users, politicians, platforms, partisan media, and far-right networks) who are mobilising misogynistic, racialised and sexualised tropes (Blanco-Alfonso et al., 2022), and exploiting platform affordances (e.g., hashtags) and algorithmic amplification to scale up their reach (Durántez-Stolle et al., 2023).

This has many implications. Persistent gendered abuse not only undermines the well-being of targeted politicians but also deters women bystanders from entering politics (Vrieling and van der Pas, 2024). Beyond the impact for the individual, studies show that violence against women in politics in Brazil operates as an 'instrument of power and anti-egalitarian obstruction' to silence women – particularly those from marginalised racial or regional backgrounds – through symbolic, psychological and digital harassment (Pinho, 2023) to further reinforce historical power structures (Carneiro, 1995). At the system level, TF-GBV entrenches exclusionary norms (Erikson et al., 2023), depresses participation and representation, and corrodes public trust in democratic institutions (Di Meco, 2021).

Overall, the FID helps to situate TF-GBV not only as a form of digital harm but as a sociotechnical and ideological project. Intersectional gender norms (enablers) are activated by political motivations (actors) through specific narratives and tactics that leverage platform affordances and algorithms. This, in turn, produces downstream impacts on participation, representation and institutional trust. In short, connecting norms to these democracy-level outcomes reinforces our core concern: the health of democracy as a whole, beyond the impact on individuals exposed to online abuse.

2.6 Reflexivity

As part of the research process, it is essential to maintain transparency regarding how the research was conducted, including hesitations, missteps, expectations, disappointments, moments of insight, and even the pleasures encountered throughout the process (O'Reilly, 2009). All authors identify as feminists and are politically left-leaning, and they are mindful of how their positions may have shaped their interpretation of the findings. To mitigate potential bias, the research team engaged in regular reflexive discussions, challenged one another's assumptions, and collaborated to revisit coding decisions to ensure that multiple perspectives were incorporated.

The authors also acknowledge that their professional networks are stronger within left-leaning parties. To counterbalance this, deliberate efforts were made to recruit interviewees across the political spectrum, resulting in a sample that, while not perfectly symmetrical, reflects meaningful ideological diversity.

Finally, all interviews were conducted by the three women authors. This was significant, given that the study addressed highly sensitive topics, including experiences of physical harm and abuse. Interviewees may have felt more comfortable, understood, and willing to share openly when speaking with other women. This dynamic is viewed as an important strength of the study.

3 Findings: mechanisms and impacts of TF-GBV in politics

The study's findings are presented in two sections to reflect the two research questions outlined in the Introduction. This section (Section 3) analyses the mechanisms and impacts of TF-GBV. It explores how intersecting identities (race, ethnicity, gender identity, age) shape women's experiences; who drives the attacks, when and where they escalate; the narratives and platforms used; and how harms travel online-offline, cascading from personal to professional and democratic levels. The next section (Section 4) maps how political parties conceptualise and address TF-GBV, situating party responses within the wider institutional context.

3.1 Women's intersecting identities shape TF-GBV experiences

Recent research has increasingly emphasised that women politicians do not experience violence in politics as a uniform phenomenon (Koch et al., 2025). The findings from our study confirm that TF-GBV in Brazilian politics does not follow a uniform pattern of abuse. Instead, it is a dynamic and adaptive form of political violence that is directed deliberately at women who are politically active.

Multiple identities actively reconfigure the way in which TF-GBV operates and determine who becomes the target, the narrative through which attacks are framed, the sources from which they originate, and their concrete consequences, from psychological harm to silencing and the restriction of women's full political participation. These findings reveal important nuances that should influence how parties and other actors should tackle TF-GBV to be effective and meaningful and not leave out women who are systemically disadvantaged.

Race and ethnicity as primary drivers of TF-GBV patterns

Attacks based on gender-stereotype (i.e., overall gendered misogyny) operate as a baseline across all groups, but the form, intensity and targets of this violence are conditioned by race/ethnicity, class, age, sexuality, gender identity, and political affiliation. Among these, race, ethnicity and gender identity (i.e., trans women) stand out as decisive axes that structure the repertoire of attacks.

Non-white women, whether on the left or the right, face explicitly racialised and intersectional forms of TF-GBV, marked by racist insults such as '*macaca*' (female monkey) and xenophobic slurs, including 'india fake' to attack an Indigenous woman as supposedly 'fake'. They also face persistent questioning of their belonging and authenticity (e.g., 'your people do not even recognise you as Indigenous'). These dynamics illustrate how racial hierarchies intersect with gendered power structures to impose an even heavier burden on non-white women in politics.⁴

Both left- and right-wing Indigenous women interviewed for this project reported that their ethnic identities are often questioned as a way to undermine their political legitimacy.

⁴ Structural racism also affects men. Given this study's focus on TF-GBV, our analysis centres on women and does not delve into men's experiences.

‘One of the opposition city councillors made a predictable comment, “Ah, she’s not even a real Indigenous woman, she came to take office with an iPhone, not with a bow and arrow...”’

Indigenous woman⁵, left-wing party

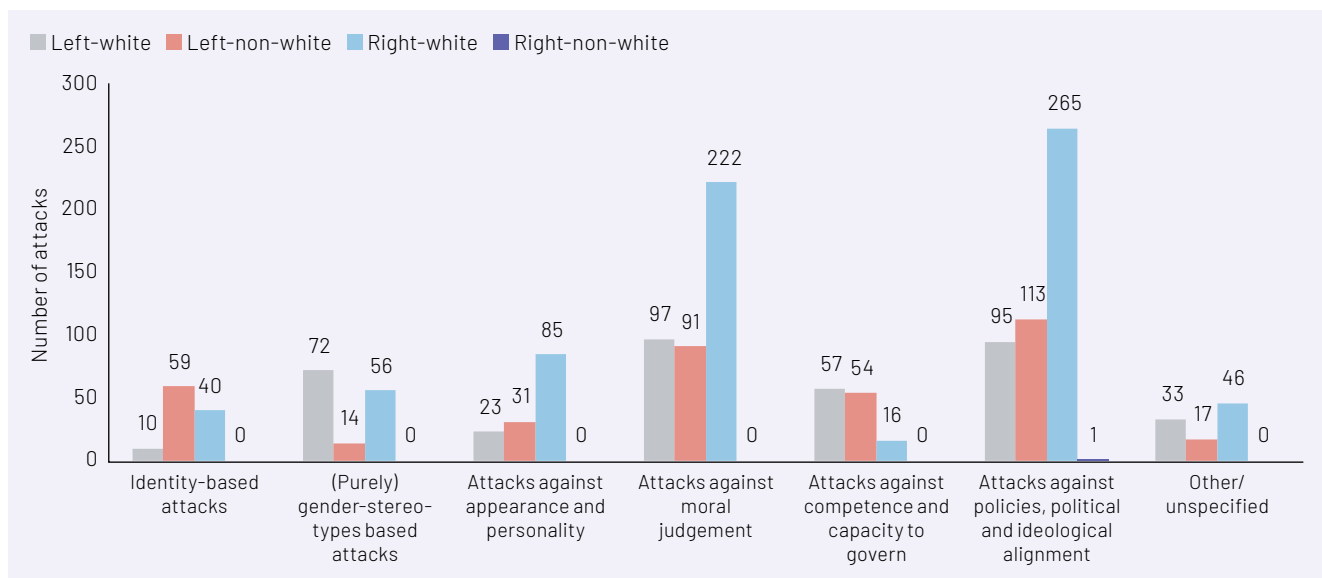
This intersectional dimension is equally pronounced in the experiences of Black women. The attacks they face intertwine with gendered, racialised, and political elements. Attacks may use racist slurs and invoke the assassinated city councillor Marielle Franco, who has become a symbol of racialised political violence, as a way to delegitimise them and threaten their safety. These messages function not only as personal attacks but also as collective warnings to other Black women in politics, reinforcing structural exclusion and deterring participation. By invoking gendered and racialised norms about who is deemed ‘fit’ for political life, such violence operates as a form of social policing and disciplines women who transgress traditional boundaries of gender, race and power (Krook and Sanin, 2016b).

‘I have already received death threats, and in my case they were very explicit. I once received an email at our office calling me a ‘monkey’ and saying that I should join with Marielle wherever she may be. I have received several messages of a racist nature.’

Black woman, left-wing party

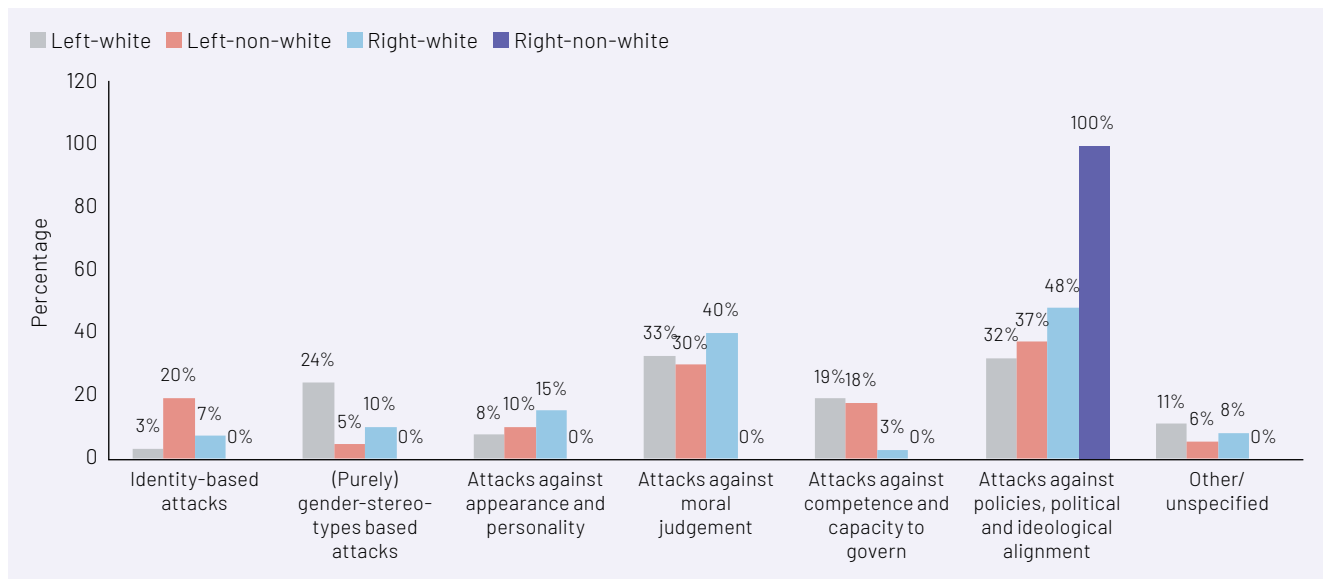
The interview findings corroborate the patterns identified in the Telegram data analysis. According to the data (Figures 2 and 3), the majority of non-white women from left-wing parties were subjected to identity-based attacks (20%, or 59 attacks), compared with significantly lower proportions of such attacks against white women from both the left (2%) and the right (7%). As previously noted, no attacks against right-wing non-white politicians were identified in the Telegram database, but this does not necessarily mean they don’t occur.

Figure 2 Distribution of attack types identified in the Telegram dataset (absolute numbers)



Source: Elaborated by the authors, based on Telegram data analysis

⁵ When analytically pertinent, we use interviewee’s self-reported race/ethnicity ‘Black’ or ‘Indigenous’ to attribute quotes, to highlight situated experiences and when it does not risk identifying participants. As noted in section 2.3, race/ethnicity is self-declared per IBGE classification (branca, preta, parda, amarela, indígena). Following established scholarship and to protect anonymity while capturing Brazil’s structural racial divide, the report aggregates the analysis for ‘white’ (branca) and ‘non-white’ (preta, parda, indígena).

Figure 3 Distribution of attack types identified in the Telegram dataset (percentage)

Source: Elaborated by the authors, based on Telegram data analysis

Gender identity and age are additional vectors of attack

The results suggest that race intersects with other aspects of women's identities, such as gender identity. A Black trans politician from a left-wing party reported that attacks tend to both question her identity and to over sexualise her:

'[I face] a systematic campaign questioning my gender identity and, at the same time, a continuous hypersexualising approach by men, most of whom identify as cis heterosexual.'

Non-white woman, left-wing party

When women in politics are not already being targeted by racialised or gender/sexual non-conformity stigmas, their age often becomes the most salient and socially available lever for attacks. Although non-white women also face age-based discrimination, interviews suggest that these attacks emerge with greater frequency and visibility in the experiences of cis-white women. For white, cisgender, heterosexual women in politics, attacks related to their age either frame them as 'too young to be in politics' or 'too old to hold this position'. As one left-wing respondent reflected, these age-coded attacks recalibrate exclusion within the political sphere over time, shifting the grounds on which women's legitimacy is challenged:

'As a young woman, it was a type of violence, just as it is a type of violence for a mature woman... in this legislature, I have started to hear people saying how old I am, how long I have been in the office, and things like 'it's time to retire.'

White woman, left-wing party

Similarly, several Telegram attacks targeting Tabata Amaral during her mayoral campaign were explicitly ageist, questioning her competence by suggesting that she was too young to run for office:

'teenage candidate 'Batata' [=stupid] Amaral.'

Attack against Tabata Amaral (left-wing party) from Telegram database

Ageism cuts across groups, but our interviews suggest it is more salient in accounts from cisgender white women. One likely reason is their greater visibility. Historically, structural racism restricted the access of non-white women (even more than white women's) to formal politics. As a result, older cohorts of women in office are disproportionately white and are better known by virtue of their longer tenure (Santos, 2009; Castelli-Rosa and Lins, 2023).

Gender stereotypes and appearance-based violence occur across all groups

Across all groups, women politicians consistently report being subjected to misogynistic insults and sexual harassment, including the receipt of unsolicited pornography and explicit images. As one right-wing respondent noted:

'Men send you dick pics, send photos of themselves naked, keep making these kinds of propositions. It happens every election.'

White woman, right-wing party

In addition to explicit sexual harassment, they face a plethora of attacks that reinforce traditional gender roles and domestic expectations, such as 'go wash the dishes'. These messages work to police the gender order, using humiliation and ridicule to push women back into private, domestic roles (Stewart et al., 2021). They therefore frame women's participation in politics as a transgression of their 'proper place' in society.

Gendered moral policing also plays a role in undermining women's independence by insinuating that their careers are sustained by men rather than earned on merit. Such narratives reinforce patriarchal norms that deny women's political agency and delegitimise their authority (Brugnoli et al., 2022; Koch et al., 2024).

Cis-white women are often targeted through aesthetic (attacks on their appearance and personality) and moralistic judgements that seek to disqualify their political legitimacy. These include body-shaming campaigns, often laced with cruelty and sexualised humiliation, as well as narratives that distort or delegitimise their agendas. This pattern is corroborated by the Telegram dataset, which shows that both right- and left-wing cis-white women were often subjected to moral-judgement attacks (40% and 33%, respectively).

These findings are supported by existing research. The #ShePersisted report (2024) documents the consistent use of appearance-based insults and moralising narratives against women public figures, particularly those aligned with feminist or progressive causes. This reflects the broader dynamic of Brazil's political polarisation, where progressive women's bodies and reputations become proxies in the battle over cultural and ideological hegemony.

In addition, women politicians experience doxxing and the exposure of their personal data; coordinated smear campaigns using memes and fake news; and the mobilisation of bots and fake accounts to intensify harassment. While men in politics also experience these forms of attacks, they tend to differ in nature and intensity (Eckert and Metzger-Riftkin, 2020). In the case of women, they are often coupled with threats of rape, many of which extend to their children and other family members. Attacks against family members (particularly children) are overwhelmingly used to target women and reflect deeply gendered norms and patterns of digital violence.

'Sharing Marielle's fate': far-right groups attack women on the left and on the right

Across the political spectrum, interviewees reported being targeted by coordinated far-right digital campaigns driven by generalised misogyny rather than political disagreement, using disinformation and gendered abuse to silence and intimidate women. This pattern is also reflected in the Telegram data.

Across all Telegram attacks analysed, approximately two-thirds originate from right-wing groups. When focusing specifically on attacks against women who are from left-wing parties, nearly all incidents (97%) come from right-wing groups. Left-wing interviewees consistently identified far-right actors and supporters of former President Bolsonaro as perpetrators of GBV and TF-GBV, describing them as organised actors who coordinate campaigns, disseminate disinformation and spread misogynistic content. As one politician observed:

'The main legitimisers of misogyny in Brazil are the principal exponents of the far right at the local, regional and national levels.'

White woman, left-wing party

One striking example is the case of Maria do Rosário, a prominent Workers' Party (PT) politician known for her long-standing feminist advocacy on culturally sensitive issues such as abortion, who has repeatedly been labelled a 'defender of rapists'. This false label has been thoroughly debunked by Agência Lupa, a verified member of the International Fact-Checking Network (Lupa, 2020), yet it was deliberately constructed by right-wing opponents to undermine public trust in her by associating her with acts and ideas perceived to be immoral by the public. Despite every fact-checking effort, the narrative continues to circulate in online spaces, illustrating how misinformation, once deployed, becomes a persistent and powerful tool of political persecution.

These attacks are particularly violent, employing a mix of disinformation tactics, including fake news, memes, and reputational inversion to delegitimise progressive agendas and silence dissenting voices. As one left-wing politician explained:

'Any woman who challenges this idea and refuses to shrink themselves in any space is the first to face orchestrated attacks. But for us women with a feminist perspective, what they truly want is for us to share Marielle's fate.'

White woman, left-wing party

Similarly, a right-wing politician described being attacked by a far-right group from within her own political spectrum, explaining:

'I'm right-wing. It was a group from my own political spectrum, dissatisfied because I had left a left-wing party and joined a right-wing party.'

White woman, right-wing party

This pattern is also reflected for other politicians in the Telegram data. For example, over 70% of the attacks against Carla Zambelli (a right-wing politician closely aligned with President Bolsonaro) originate from right-wing groups, meaning that she is often targeted by her own ideological allies. This dynamic highlights internal fractures within the right, particularly in the aftermath of Bolsonaro's electoral defeat, when Zambelli became a scapegoat (Mizael, 2025). On the eve of the 2022 runoff, she drew a firearm and pointed it at a man on a São Paulo street (G1, 2022), an incident circulated widely online. Bolsonaro later suggested the episode 'cost him the mandate', turning Zambelli into a convenient fall person for the defeat (UOL, 2025). This dynamic intensified after her convictions in 2025, which further branded her as a reputational and legal liability. Her case demonstrates the defamatory practices and attack strategies that are routinely employed within these networks. Given her visibility and controversy, attacks on Zambelli alone account for as many attacks as all of those aimed at left-wing figures in the sample combined.

One right-wing interviewee referred to attacks from what was described as the 'radical left', alleging the existence of organised campaigns involving disinformation and coordinated online harassment. However, this pattern is not clearly reflected in the Telegram data.

Women suffer attacks from within their own political groups and/or parties

Right-wing interviewees reported attacks coming from within their own parties, as a form of institutional gatekeeping and exclusion. Insider leaks of personal data, disinformation campaigns, and deliberate undermining by male colleagues operate as mechanisms of control, reinforcing patriarchal norms that restrict women's autonomy and advancement in conservative parties. One right-wing interviewee, for example, reported that a former adviser leaked her personal information to external sources, including her home address, thereby placing her at considerable risk.

Such attacks are also reported as a form of political statement or pressure, as illustrated by a right-wing Indigenous woman. She reported that she organised a meeting of Indigenous women and invited both party-affiliated and independent councillors in an effort to secure visible support from male peers. Not one attended. This absence was perceived as a disregard for the political agendas of Indigenous women and contributed to their further marginalisation within institutional spaces. Another Indigenous woman shared, that a member of her own party wrote in a WhatsApp group:

'I don't know who convinced you that you could be anything.'

Indigenous woman, right-wing party

The violent nature of the attacks can escalate. A white politician recounted a years-long campaign of defamation, bullying, and harassment on social media orchestrated by members of her former party. She described the severity of the threats she faced:

'They threatened to kill me, they threatened to rape me, they threatened to kill my child... These are among some of the threats I suffered on social media.'

White woman, right-wing party

Cross-ideological attacks are not exclusive to the right: on Telegram, a small proportion (5%) of attacks against Tabata Amaral originate from left-wing groups. It is likely that they are linked to her policy positions and congressional votes, which have, at times, conflicted with left-wing expectations. This suggests that the failure to pass 'ideological purity' tests can generate intra-party and intra-spectrum hostility, further exposing women politicians to targeted harassment.

Coordinated attacks

Both political groups describe encounters with anonymous/bot networks in interviews. Politicians report coordinated attacks from accounts without clear identities, although they debate whether these represent actual bots or real people. One politician discovered that attackers 'recruited university students who stayed in rooms, on computers, attacking me all day'.

The Telegram analysis developed for this study supports these orchestration claims, as peaks in attacks tend to consist of repeated messages that are copy-pasted across different groups, signalling coordinated campaigns rather than organic hostility. For example, in the peaks in abuse observed for Erika Hilton in June 2025 (see Figure 5 in Section 3.2) which were later condemned by her party, 75% of the attacks consisted of the same message:

'Erika Hilton is the living embodiment of George Orwell's *Animal Farm*: for her to fight the evil capitalism, 'someone' has to suffer so she can have straight blonde hair, wear designer clothes, and go to Paris to see Beyoncé's show in order to defend your 'cause'.'

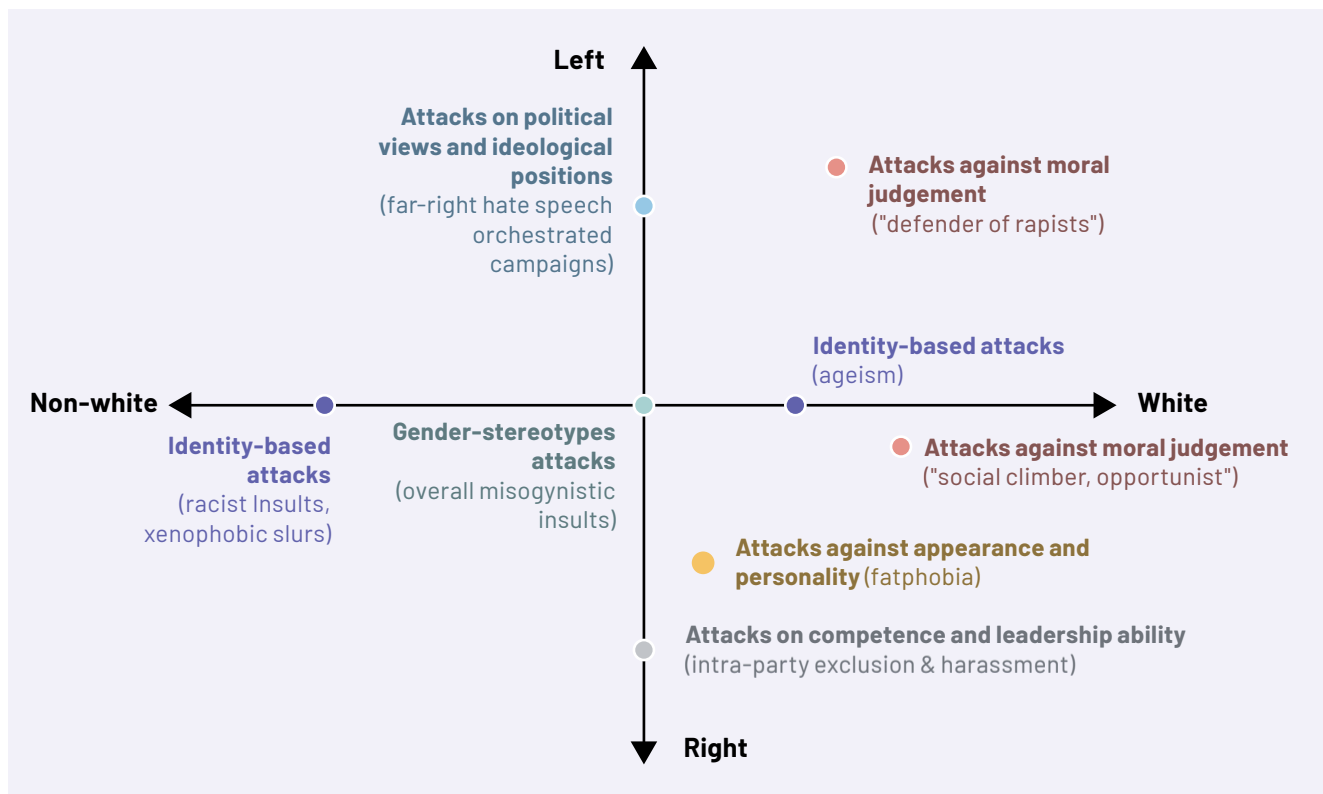
Attack against Erika Hilton (left-wing party) from Telegram database

Other peaks were also observed, such as those targeting Carla Zambelli at the end of 2022 (see Figure 5 in Section 3.2). Of the 82 attacks recorded in the general elections (President, Congress, Governors) of December 2022, more than 90% were repeated messages, and at least five distinct messages were circulated, each reposted three or more times across different groups.

Demographic and political identities shape experiences of TF-GBV

Overall, findings confirm that both demographic (race and ethnicity, age, gender identity) and political identities shape women's experiences of VAWIP and TF-GBV. Figure 4 illustrates how these intersecting vectors of attack are deployed strategically, revealing distinct patterns of TF-GBV that emerge at the intersection of race, political affiliation and other identity markers.

Figure 4 Intersectional dynamics of TF-GBV: Key attack patterns across groups



Note: Given the limited sample size, the distribution of categories in Figure 4 should be interpreted with caution. Some categories may reflect the experiences of a small number of individuals rather than broader patterns. The figure is, therefore, intended to illustrate the range and types of attacks reported, rather than to support statistical inference. Source: Elaborated by the authors, based on Telegram and interviews data analysis

While all women politicians are subject to baseline gender-based attacks, the intensity and form of these attacks are inevitably shaped by race, ethnicity and gender identity. Across all groups, appearance-based attacks and moral judgements are common, although they manifest differently depending on racial and political lines, with white women targeted more frequently by aesthetic critiques and moral policing.

Political affiliation can operate both as a shield and a target, particularly as politically motivated stakeholders weaponise TF-GBV across the political spectrum. As noted, intra-party attacks function as institutional gatekeeping mechanisms, with women reporting insider personal data leaks, deliberate undermining by male colleagues, and exclusion tactics that reinforce patriarchal control within party structures. Cross-ideological attacks occur when women's positions conflict with ideological purity expectations, as seen in left-wing attacks against centrist figures. That being said,

right-wing women are in a delicate situation, as cases such as Carla Zambelli's illustrate that women can face substantial and violent attacks from their own ideological allies, demonstrating internal fractures and scapegoating dynamics within conservative networks.

In Brazil's polarised context, these patterns reveal that TF-GBV is deeply entangled with struggles over political power and representation. For left-wing women, online violence functions as a tool of ideological warfare, aiming to delegitimise progressive agendas in the public sphere. For right-wing women, it operates as a mechanism of gatekeeping, disciplining those who challenge male-dominated hierarchies within conservative structures. Together, these dynamics show that political polarisation does not merely amplify the volume of attacks but reconfigures their logic, shaping the actors, platforms and narratives through which TF-GBV is deployed.

3.2 Elections are important, but visibility matters more

Elections are widely recognised as periods of heightened attacks against women in politics (Gatto and Thome, 2024). Recent research on Brazil confirms this pattern, showing that female candidates were subjected to intense online misogyny during the 2022 elections (Koch et al., 2024). Comparative studies further suggest that elevated levels of violent events during electoral periods can reduce women's legislative representation (Wood, 2024).

To examine whether this trend holds, and whether responses to TF-GBV should focus on certain periods over time, this study combined Telegram data mapped across three Brazilian election cycles (2020 municipal, 2022 general, and 2024 municipal) with the interviews with women politicians and party leaders. The analysis does find evidence of intensified attacks during election periods. However, it also reveals that such attacks are sustained once women are elected and in office. This indicates that political violence is not confined to the electoral moment but persists, and often increases, throughout their mandates.

These patterns may differ across other social media platforms that are not included in the scope of this study, so this finding is not generalisable. Nevertheless, it highlights critical concerns about how and when TF-GBV occurs, and contributes to knowledge that can help to frame solutions.

Electoral cycles are not the primary driver of attacks

Across the Telegram attacks collected and classified for both right-wing (Carla Zambelli) and left-wing politicians (Tabata Amaral, Maria do Rosário, Erika Hilton, Marina Silva), election periods do not emerge as the primary drivers of online aggression overall (Figure 5). Only two clear peaks coincide with electoral windows: one involving Tabata Amaral during the 2024 municipal campaign, and another targeting Erika Hilton during the 2022 congressional race. Even Carla Zambelli's 2022 peak occurred after the election, when she became a scapegoat for Bolsonaro's defeat following her gun incident (described earlier) and was attacked simultaneously by right-wing groups, which labelled her a traitor, and by left-wing groups, which mocked her political choices.

Political prominence and influence fuel continuous targeting beyond elections

As illustrated by the example of these prominent women politicians in Figure 5, attacks against women politicians seem to occur predominantly outside election periods. This pattern was corroborated in our interviews, with one elected official observing that ‘political violence occurs during the term and discourages women from continuing’, while another reflected that, after being elected, she was ‘no longer able to walk alone... if someone recognises you and is a Bolsonaro supporter, they curse at you’. The analysis highlights that women politicians are targeted in distinct contexts, with attacks intensifying at specific moments that extend well beyond electoral cycles, including the following:

- **High-profile politicians face sustained attacks.** A number of politicians in the Telegram sample occupy particularly prominent positions in Brazilian politics and are the continuous targets of online aggression, such as Minister Marina Silva and Congresswoman Maria do Rosário. Some of the most extreme content identified in the dataset targeted Maria do Rosário directly, including explicit incitements to violence, such as ‘a woman in politics, feminist and pro-abortion, deserves to be beaten in honour of Maria da Penha’.
- **Involvement with polarising policy topics.** The most significant peak of attacks against Congresswoman Tabata Amaral occurred between June and July 2020, during her first term in the Chamber of Deputies. Analysis indicates that this backlash was triggered by her involvement with two legislative proposals: PL 3063/2020, which she authored, and PL 2630/2020, which she supported. Both bills focused on internet regulation, were highly polarised, and were framed by opponents as advancing a left-wing agenda. Erika Hilton offers another example of visibility-driven attacks linked to polarising policy debates, with Telegram attacks against her intensifying from November 2024, with a marked increase after January 2025. This surge coincided with the circulation of her [viral video](#) on the highly polarised Pix⁶ policy debate in January 2025, which garnered over 200 million views on Instagram (CNN, 2025).
- **Clashes with high-profile polarising figures.** The cases of three women who are among the most frequently targeted, and who occupy different positions on the political spectrum, illustrate how heightened visibility through public conflict amplifies the likelihood of attack significantly. Both Carla Zambelli and Maria do Rosário, white women with high visibility (the latter with a long public-facing political career) experienced intensified attacks following public confrontations with former President Jair Bolsonaro, which made them particular targets for radical right-wing groups and Bolsonaro supporters. Many Telegram messages referenced the notorious 2014 incident in which Bolsonaro told Maria do Rosário that he ‘would not rape her because she does not deserve it’ (Ramalho, 2016). As outlined earlier, Carla Zambelli’s trajectory illustrates how shifting political relationships from friend to enemy of a polarising figure can shape patterns of attack. In an electoral context, Tabata Amaral also experienced a surge in attacks following her public confrontations with Pablo Marçal, a populist right-wing politician, with many Telegram messages amplifying and reiterating his criticisms of her.
- **Events of heightened visibility.** Specific high-profile events were found to trigger concentrated waves of attacks against women politicians. For instance, Marina Silva’s participation in the World Economic Forum in Davos coincided with a marked peak of Telegram attacks in January 2024, most of which were classified as ‘attacks against moral judgement’. A single message was disseminated 17 times across different groups, indicating coordinated amplification. Similarly, moments of personal legal crisis were found to amplify targeting, such as Carla Zambelli’s convictions in 2025 (G1, 2025). During this period, most messages were categorised as ‘attacks

⁶ Pix is Brazil’s instant payment system, launched by the Central Bank in 2020. It enables free, real-time transfers between individuals, businesses and government accounts using simple identifiers such as Individual Taxpayer Identification Numbers, phone numbers, email addresses or QR codes (Banco Central do Brasil, 2025).

against policies, political and ideological alignment’, with detractors labelling her ‘fake right-wing’ and ‘fake conservative’. These patterns suggest that moments of political vulnerability, whether through controversial public appearances or legal sanctions, create opportunities for opponents to escalate their campaigns against women politicians.

Overall, the intensity of attacks appears to scale up as women’s visibility grows. Women politicians are particularly targeted once they gain political relevance and visibility through four distinct pathways: holding high-profile positions, engaging with polarising policies, clashing with prominent figures, and participating in high-visibility events. Together, these patterns corroborate observations from our interviewees that ‘political violence occurs during the term and discourages women from continuing’. This suggests that political relevance and visibility, rather than electoral timing, is the primary catalyst for TF-GBV against women in politics. These findings also coincide with recent literature: a study has found that left-wing candidates with high visibility received far more online attacks during the 2022 elections, especially attacks that target moral reputation (Koch et al., 2025).

3.3 Multilayered impacts and coping mechanisms across identities and political spectrum

TF-GBV impacts women across all identities and political viewpoints

TF-GBV affects all women and permeates both their personal and professional realms. Personally, interviewees described sustained psychological harm – chronic stress, anxiety, depressive episodes, panic attacks, emotional exhaustion and anger. This was often accompanied by social withdrawal both online and offline. Paradoxically, this protects them in the short term, yet deepens their isolation and erodes their confidence. The harm radiates to families: partners and parents share the fear and stress; children are targeted by sexualised edits and fake news or must change routines and even their surnames for safety. Prolonged strain also manifests physically, with reports of hospitalisations, cardiovascular symptoms, weight fluctuations, and chronic illness – turning political participation into a site of somatic harm.

Professionally and politically, TF-GBV produces a compound sabotage effect: fear that online threats will spill over into offline violence drives costly security measures, relocations and constrained mobility. Persistent surveillance pressures women into self-censorship and reduced visibility, while coordinated disinformation and hate campaigns damage reputations, depress follower bases, and can cost re-election. These dynamics shrink women’s public space and, in a context like Brazil, where women are already a minority among incumbents, each exit represents a collective setback that resets the lengthy, resource-intensive process of building women’s political careers.

Yet many interviewees also described a counter-impact: hatred fuelling resolve. Most elected women reported a strengthened commitment to remain in politics and represent other women. This echoes moments of collective mobilisation (such as the ‘Marielle seeds’ phenomenon) where trauma catalysed candidacies by Black and Indigenous women. In short, TF-GBV both exposes and entrenches structural barriers to gender-equal political participation, while simultaneously galvanising networks of resistance that keep women in the arena.

Coping mechanisms span legal, digital, psychological and collective strategies

Women in politics respond to TF-GBV with evolving bundles of tactics that cut across legal, digital, security, psychological and collective fronts. Many pursue formal complaints to prosecutors, police, electoral courts, or the judiciary – particularly in cases of doxxing, death threats or incitement – yet face slow, uneven enforcement and sparse intra-party support (only a few parties reportedly have monitoring/reporting channels).

As a first line of defence, they adopt strict 'digital hygiene' (blocking/muting, moderating comments, restricting direct messages sent on social media (DMs), delegating inboxes). This reduces the immediate harm but can also curtail their visibility and constituent contact. Offline, they implement security protocols – escorts, route planning, avoiding risky venues, relocation – often at personal expense as a result of institutional gaps. In effect, the costs of safety are transferred to the woman who is being targeted.

Parallel psychological and collective strategies help women stay in the political arena. Individually, they invest in therapy, coaching and skill-building (e.g., cognitive/behavioural tools). Many perform a hardened public persona to avoid being cast as 'victims', a coping stance that can preserve credibility but intensify private strain.

Collectively (and most prominently among left-wing politicians, though present across the spectrum), women mobilise solidarity networks of peers, movements, and civil society organisations (CSOs) to denounce abuse, counter online swarms, and share legal and mental-health support. These cross-party shields reframe harassment, shifting it from a personal ordeal to a democratic concern. They also redistribute the emotional and logistical burden and mitigate the chilling effect that would otherwise push women out of public life.

4 Findings: parties' and institutional responses to TF-GBV

In its second section of findings, this report examines institutional responses to TF-GBV, particularly from parties. First, it examines how TF-GBV is conceptualised by political parties, showing that it remains largely subsumed under broader understandings of GBV and that ideological differences shape framings of gender inequality, as reflected in both party documents and interviews. Second, it explores actions taken by parties to address GBV and TF-GBV, highlighting that responses (ranging from public statements to legal support and security measures) are generally reactive, case-by-case and insufficient, with meaningful progress tied to women's access to decision-making structures within parties. Third, it situates party responses within Brazil's broader legal and social environment to identify legislative and implementation gaps, entrenched social norms, and the need to improve the wider political environment to ensure women's full participation. Together, these three sections illustrate both the limits of current institutional responses and the systemic reforms needed to address TF-GBV effectively in Brazilian politics.

While this study adopts an intersectional framework to understand how multiple identities shape women's experiences of TF-GBV in politics, the empirical analysis presented in this section does not apply an intersectional lens. This is the result of data limitations, as the information collected does not include systematic variables or disaggregated data related to intersecting identities such as race, age, sexuality or gender identity.

4.1 TF-GBV remains intrinsically conceptualised as GBV across the political spectrum

This section outlines the way in which political parties conceptualise the TF-GBV phenomenon. From a gender norms perspective, this study argues that explaining how political parties understand TF-GBV requires an understanding of how both elected women and party representatives themselves comprehend these phenomena. By examining party documents alongside interviews, this section highlights the extent to which parties recognise gender-based violence, how they frame inequalities, and whether they differentiate technology-facilitated forms from broader patterns of GBV.

Political ideology frames the understanding of gender inequalities

Party documents are important (although not enough) to understand formal institutional positions. Our review of the *estatutos* (founding documents and party guidelines) and websites of all 20 parties with elected congressional representation is summarised in Table 2, revealing ideological divides in how gender-related issues are formally addressed.

Half of all parties mention 'gender' in their *estatutos*, while 85% reference 'woman'. However, this distribution is skewed by political orientation: nearly all left-leaning parties studied in this report (6 out of 7) include 'gender' in their founding documents compared to only a third of right-leaning parties (4 out of 13). This disparity reflects the polarisation of gender terminology in Brazilian politics, particularly since 2018 when conservative and far-right movements heavily criticised the concept of 'gender ideology' (Gomes da Costa Santos, 2021). Quantitatively, 'woman' appears far more frequently than 'gender' across party documents (158 versus 30 mentions), with right-leaning parties actually referencing 'woman' more frequently on average (9 mentions on average per *estatuto*) than left-leaning parties (6 mentions on average per *estatuto*).

Table 2 Distribution of gender, women and violence-related mentions in official documentation and websites of the 20 parties currently represented in the Chamber of Deputies

Political spectrum	Estatutos				Websites			
	Mentions of word		Mentions associated with violence		Mentions of word		Mentions associated with violence	
	gender	women	gender	women	gender	women	gender	women
Left and centre-left (7 parties)	6	7	1	2	7	7	7	6
	86%	100%	14%	29%	100%	100%	100%	86%
Right and centre-right (13 parties)	4	10	0	3	12	13	10	11
	31%	77%	0%	23%	92%	100%	77%	85%

Source: Elaborated by the authors, based on review of the estatuto and website of each political party

When examining violence-related provisions, only one party (PT) explicitly mentions gender-based violence in its *estatuto*, while a quarter of parties (7 out of 20) address violence against women. Notably, the party *Republicanos* represents an outlier with 27 mentions of violence against women, reflecting the establishment of the ‘National Observatory for Combating Political Violence Against Women’ in the most recent update of its *estatuto* (2023).

Party websites, which are updated more often and are responsive to current affairs, show greater convergence across the political spectrum. All parties mention ‘woman’ and only one party (*Novo*, right-leaning) fails to mention ‘gender’ on its website. The vast majority discuss both gender-based violence and violence against women, typically in news sections covering initiatives, events or policies supported by party members. The issue of political violence against women is a relatively recent concern, and party *estatutos* often change at a much slower pace.

Beyond formal documents, understanding how political parties truly conceptualise TF-GBV requires a deeper examination of gender norms and lived experiences. To do so, our interviews explored how the foundational concepts of gender inequalities, gender-based violence, and ultimately TF-GBV are conceptualised by both the leaders of parties and by party members. Based on the interviews with women politicians and party representatives, the study identified both convergences and divergences in how different left-leaning vs. right-leaning parties understand the progression from gender inequalities to TF-GBV.

The interviews found consensus across the political spectrum that politics remains male-dominated, that women’s entry reallocates power and triggers backlash, and that family and care responsibilities create a ‘double burden’ that constrains women’s political participation. The divergence lies primarily in the analytical frameworks used to explain and make sense of gender inequalities.

Left-leaning parties employ a structural lens that emphasises the structural and intersectional disparities that are rooted in patriarchy and reinforced by racism, classism and hetero-cisnormativity. They consider that gender inequalities manifest in under-representation and gatekeeping (a lack of funds, TV time, decision spaces), the undervaluation of women’s voices/competence, and the care burden that restricts participation and ascent, both inside parties and across society.

Right-leaning parties are less uniform in their understanding of gender inequalities but tend to frame gender inequalities through a ‘societal *machismo*’ lens. Inequalities are primarily described as societal, cultural and behavioural, and essentialising approaches are sometimes leveraged to

emphasise biological explanations that reference hormones and voice characteristics. They consider that inequalities manifest in barriers, such as normative gender scripts ('do politics as a woman': care/temperance), family frictions (jealous partners, childcare/double burden), the pigeonholing of identity agendas, and the invisibility of non-elected women (party staff, advisors and women in the party's activist base), who do much of the political work but rarely appear in formal decision-making spaces.

Parties and politicians are not distinguishing GBV from TF-GBV

Both sides of the political spectrum recognise that GBV functions as a deliberate strategy to delegitimise and silence women in politics, with attacks intensifying as women gain visibility and assume leadership roles. They also acknowledge that GBV spans the psychological, symbolic, economic sexual, and physical dimensions. However, they do not understand that GBV and TF-GBV are distinct phenomena.

Examples reported in interviews include scrutiny of appearance/behaviour, '*elogios tortos*' (backhanded compliments), diminishing stereotypes, moral policing, interruptions, reputation smears, threats of violence, and femicide, all of which occur both within and outside party structures. Both left and right-leaning women acknowledge that such violence intensifies for Black women, while left-leaning politicians also emphasise that gender-diverse people, trans women, and women from marginalised communities face particularly intense targeting. Across the political spectrum, women emphasise that this form of violence is particularly intense and is experienced by women and men in very different ways, as one interviewee notes:

'It's not right for a woman to be destroyed, to be torn apart, to be driven crazy, to be made sick, to be persecuted, to have her children persecuted, her family persecuted, that cannot be the price to pay. That's not even the price that [powerful male politician], who is a criminal, pays. Nobody pays that price. Which left-wing men pay that price? Not even [the President] pays that price. This is the common price [for women], and it's not a rare price.'

Party leader, left-wing party

That being said, most interviewees, including from party leaders to women in politics, do not understand TF-GBV as a phenomenon that is distinct from GBV. While they recognise general GBV, there is a limited focus on how technology amplifies, transforms and creates new forms of violence. Some consider that digital violence pertains primarily to the domain of threats, and that there may be a 'gradation of how much more real it can become, moving from online to the real world' as one woman explained:

'Not that digital [violence] isn't also concrete [and] material, but it's different; digital [violence] often remains at the threat level, often staying only in the sphere of threats.'

Party leader, left-wing party

In general, there is an understanding, either explicit or implicit, that there is a continuum between online and offline violence, without distinguishing where one ends and the other starts. Interviewees have shared examples of disinformation campaigns spinning off into acts of physical aggression, such as:

'Just imagine: the first collective physical attack I suffered, not an isolated street assault, was because of disinformation on social networks, and that was already a decade ago.'

Party leader, left-wing party

This finding from the interviews is further corroborated by the document review: among the 20 parties examined, no specific strategy, manifesto or policy document to address TF-GBV specifically was identified. As a result, no significant differences were found across party lines, suggesting that the conceptualisation of TF-GBV remains underdeveloped across the political spectrum. Interviewees also mention a ‘radioactivity’ effect that isolates targets and that can deter allies from speaking out against cases of TF-GBV.

In general, interviewees understand TF-GBV as attacks that occur across digital platforms, ranging from emails and private messaging to WhatsApp and open platforms like Instagram and Facebook. There is a recognition that these are platform-mediated attacks involving networked actions that exploit digital affordances to target women. Some interviewees mentioned ‘bots’ explicitly, reporting coordinated attacks that are spread through what appear to be organised bot networks. Several interviewees also expressed confusion about how to respond to such attacks, noting that while they initially engaged with attackers, they later learned it was better not to respond:

‘Regarding social media, women didn’t understand they were responding to a bot, not a person, so you’re wasting precious campaign time on something worthless. It’s not people, you won’t change votes there because there are no votes, no people. They have great difficulty [understanding this].’

Party leader, left-wing party

4.2 Actions from parties to tackle TFGBV exist but are insufficient

Responses across the political spectrum are GBV-centred and case-based

Responses to violence faced by women are centred primarily on GBV rather than TF-GBV, consistent with the finding mentioned above. Overall, parties tend to prioritise the most extreme cases of violence, which often involve threats to physical integrity.

Left-leaning interviewees highlight instances of support received from their parties, and certain party leaders report concrete measures taken to protect women, which are outlined below. However, they still acknowledge that support remains insufficient, given the pervasiveness of the problem.

‘The party does very little about it. Whatever it does is only because women push for it.’

Party leader, right-wing party

The right-wing party leaders interviewed tend to be more critical of their parties. They consistently report feeling abandoned when targeted and receiving – at most – symbolic statements of solidarity rather than concrete assistance.

‘So they do nothing, they do not offer protection, they are not even supportive, and they leave these women in a state of profound isolation.’

Party leader, left-wing party

Only one party mentions a dedicated body for addressing violence: PSOL’s Militant Security Secretariat, which addresses ‘gender, race, and LGBTQI-phobic violence predominantly’. Through documentary research, this study identified *Republicanos*’ ‘Observatory for Combating Political Violence Against Women,’ though this was not mentioned in our interview with that party. Further research is needed to understand this observatory’s actual activities. Some parties mention that women’s wings handle complaints and provide follow-up (PT, *Podemos*), while others reference broader support professionals (lawyers, psychologists) serving the party generally.

In terms of reporting channels, some parties have established channels through party ethics councils or ombudsman offices for cases of violence perpetrated by party members, including PSOL, *Podemos*, and *Cidadania*. However, this research found no formal reporting forms or systematic processes designed specifically for GBV or TF-GBV cases, even for internal incidents. More research is needed to understand the scope and operationalisation of these channels.

In addition, no party reported having documented processes outlining the steps to follow when members experience GBV or TF-GBV from external actors. Some left-leaning parties describe informal processes. For example, PT's Women's Secretariat provides victim assistance by issuing statements and through the public exposure of cases. In general, however, responses lack standardisation and systematic implementation across party structures. The overall absence of parties' official channels contributes to explaining why women pursue legal and institutional pathways without parties' support to address severe cases of VAWIP and TF-GBV (see section 3.3).

When it comes to TF-GBV, and particularly attacks via social media, responses are constrained by practical challenges, including the vast amount of information, the unregulated nature of digital platforms and the complexity of coordinated attacks. No political party conducts active monitoring of social media platforms to identify attacks against their women members, nor do they consider this a priority. This gap reflects both practical and resource constraints: the systematic monitoring of all female candidates and politicians across thousands of municipalities would require substantial investment.

Rather than centralised party-led monitoring, a more feasible approach might involve establishing protocols for the reporting of violence, including TF-GBV, that facilitate rapid response. PSOL mentions creating 'a link for fake news to be exposed and reported,' while PCdoB relies on 'party militancy that becomes sentinels' for informal monitoring through activist networks.

Overall, the challenges of addressing GBV and TF-GBV become more complex at the municipal level, leaving many women without adequate support. Given that resources for addressing violence remain insufficient even at the national level, the situation deteriorates in local contexts, with lack of resources creating multiple barriers to effective response.

Municipal and state party structures tend to operate with fewer resources and weaker organisational capacity than their national counterparts, making them ill-equipped to handle complex cases of violence. Simultaneously, the hierarchical nature of party structures means that complaints from local levels struggle to reach the national party leadership level where resources and expertise might be available. The result can be characterised as hierarchical abandonment: cases become lost among Brazil's thousands of municipalities, where local party directories lack the resources, lawyers or institutional capacity needed to provide meaningful support to women experiencing GBV and TF-GBV.

Public statements, legal support and security measures are case-by-case

While the response from political parties may be insufficient overall, interviewees do report actions from parties to address GBV. These appear to be connected to the scale and visibility of violence: once attacks reach a certain threshold, parties are more likely to go public (meaning less visible women, including those in smaller municipalities, tend to receive less attention/support).

To assess the public solidarity of parties with women members who have been attacked, this report analysed party responses to the peaks of documented attacks against five Congresswomen/Ministers on Telegram, searching official party accounts on Telegram, Instagram and official websites. Public statements from parties were found in only two cases: those of Erika Hilton (PSOL) and Carla Zambelli (PL), representing opposite ends of the political spectrum. Notably, both cases involved serious

accusations (misuse of public funds and fleeing the country to escape judicial investigation) that could potentially impact the parties themselves.

Beyond these high-visibility cases, isolated instances of defence were identified, such as PL Women’s Instagram support for Silvia Waiapi (PL Mulher Amapá Oficial, 2025). One right-wing councillor mentioned that her party issued a repudiation note after the violence she experienced in her city council, but we were unable to locate this party statement. At the other end of the political spectrum, multiple repudiation notes defending PSOL politicians such as Monica Seixas⁷, Amanda Paschoal⁸ and Livia Duarte⁹, were found on their party’s official website. Although public statements are important, especially as they may reflect more awareness and importance given to the topic by parties, they are far from sufficient, as argued by an interviewee:

‘I had a support statement, but that alone isn’t enough. A statement of condemnation, that’s not enough, we really need actual support.’

Non-white woman, right-wing party

Beyond institutional party responses, one party (PSOL) mentions activating its members for solidarity, which they call ‘a technological solidarity network’ where people coordinate to give visibility to cases. As the interviewee mentions, ‘the more noise you make, the better’, which operates as a ‘visibility protocol’. Relatedly, another left-leaning party (PCdoB) mentions relying on their members to help surface cases of attacks, as mentioned above.

Across the political spectrum, parties from both left and right offer forms of legal assistance to women members experiencing violence, though the scope and specialisation of this support varies according to the cases and parties. This assistance can encompass different stages of the judicial process, from initial reporting and police engagement to ongoing case follow-up and courtroom representation.

In the interviews, right-leaning parties like *União Brasil* report providing comprehensive support to help women ‘enter the justice system, with accounts, actions, reaching the police plus legal referrals for legal measures,’ while Novo offers ‘help for judicial processes.’ On the left, PT maintains ‘a law office at disposal’ for members, and PSB ‘assists in judicial actions plus lawyer, accountant, psychologist available, especially for women.’

PSOL provides the most comprehensive response, stating that ‘when there’s a direct attack on parliamentarians, the party gives full solidarity, issues notes, sends to press, provides support and even judicial support’. However, there are limitations around the specialisation of legal support. One interviewee emphasised that legal accompaniment must be specialised for violence cases, and that party lawyers who tend to be specialists in electoral law may lack the expertise to handle cases of GBV effectively. This gap was illustrated when a party lawyer reportedly dismissed a violence case, highlighting the need for legal professionals who are trained specifically in GBV-related law rather than using general party legal counsel.

‘We looked for these lawyers, but we saw that they didn’t have [the expertise], they weren’t qualified for this because they said it didn’t even qualify as a breach of parliamentary decorum – it didn’t qualify! How could a situation like this not qualify? So we could already see that they weren’t capable.’

Non-white woman, right-wing party

⁷ State Deputy Monica Seixas suffered political GBV when Deputy Wellington Moura stated on the floor that he would ‘put a bridle’ in her mouth (PSOL, 2022).

⁸ Amanda Paschoal was a victim of political and transphobic violence by councillor Lucas Pavanato (PSOL, 2025b).

⁹ Livia Duarte suffered political violence on social media following the repercussions of her support for the occupation of the Pará State Department of Education by Indigenous movements resisting the dismantling of public education that was being promoted by Governor Helder Barbalho (PSOL, 2025a).

Only a few parties mention protection measures that require significant investment for serious cases (PSOL, PT, *Podemos*). In reality, threats to a woman's physical integrity create cascading consequences that affect everything from grocery shopping to the need to periodically change residences. Typically, the financial burden for security measures falls on the individual woman herself, highlighting the need for parties to strengthen their provision of security support.

'The party provides security schemes when necessary, armoured cars, sending people out of the country for a period, assistance for women to change houses/stay in hotels if necessary.'

Party leader, left-wing party

Regarding TF-GBV more specifically, existing solutions are described by one interviewee as 'analogue solutions for the digital world', as traditional security measures cannot address the challenges created by the continuum between GBV and TF-GBV. For example, far-right actors employ both legal and illegal monetisation strategies¹⁰, while algorithms favour hate content over democratic discourse (Metzler and Garcia, 2023). Parties still need to better understand how to address the implications of these characteristics of the digital space.

Women's access to decision-making in parties is needed to tackle GBV and TF-GBV

According to our interviewees, the expansion of women's access to party decision-making structures is vital to improve how parties address GBV and TF-GBV. All parties across the political spectrum maintain women's wings or groups, an organisational feature that has become standard practice in contemporary Brazilian politics. According to interviewees from left-leaning parties, these structures have played crucial roles in crafting women's spaces within parties, advancing representation goals, and pushing gender issues on to party platforms. However, right-leaning parties report less organised internal feminist movements, reflecting broader ideological differences about gender equality. The mere existence of these structures, while significant, does not guarantee meaningful influence. Understanding the actual access to resources and decision-making power granted to these wings within party hierarchies requires further investigation.

Indeed, women's access to top leadership positions reveals stark differences between parties of varying ideological traditions and organisational histories. The desk research conducted for this study shows that 50% of left-leaning parties have had women presidents, compared to only 17% of right-leaning parties – a disparity that illustrates differences in women's access to power hierarchies and decision-making positions within party structures.

Interviewees from left-leaning parties acknowledge that even in parties where women were central to founding efforts, institutional inertia initially relegated women to grassroots activism rather than leadership roles. That being said, women's feminist groups within these parties actively pushed for gender issues in party platforms, achieving success in the creation of quotas and dedicated women's sectors.

In contrast, interviewees from right-leaning parties rarely mention women's historical roles, with the majority of parties having never had women in top leadership until recently. These interviewees confirm persistent 'glass ceiling effects', including the subtle undermining of women in formal positions and the constant need for women to prove their legitimacy.

¹⁰ Legal monetisation strategies refer to platform-enabled revenues such as ads, donations, subscription channels. Illegal strategies are practices such as selling of or extorting with intimate unauthorised material, or paid doxxing/harassment services.

Two left-leaning parties (PT and PSOL) report implementing 50-50 gender quotas in leadership levels, while one right-leaning party (*União Brasil*) mentions programmes to encourage women's participation in state directories. Overall, the majority of interviewees, across the political spectrum, emphasise that women need to reach power hierarchies within parties to prioritise issues like GBV and TF-GBV, suggesting that organisational structure has a direct impact on policy priorities.

Despite formal commitments to gender equality, discriminatory practices persist within party structures across the political spectrum, although they manifest differently depending on ideological orientation. Even within left-leaning parties that have adopted formal gender policies, interviewees report persistent sexist practices including intimidation and the marginalisation of women members. Right-leaning parties face particularly acute challenges related to patterns of structural exclusion. Interviewees describe women being relegated systematically to thematic committees rather than decision-making positions, which limits their influence over party priorities and resource allocation.

This structural marginalisation has a direct impact on parties' capacity to understand and respond to issues affecting women politicians. Internal hostility and isolation represent additional barriers and are reported particularly within right-leaning parties. Interviewees report hostile environments, lack of solidarity from male colleagues and even expulsion attempts. One interviewee, who reported some of the most violent attacks, both online and offline, stated that the perpetrators were fellow party members who wanted to expel her from the party. Such climates not only discourage women's participation but also perpetuate GBV.

4.3 Legislation and social norms hinder responses to women's experiences of TF-GBV in politics

Legislative and implementation gaps constrain potential responses

Beyond the initiatives undertaken by political parties, interviewees stressed the urgent need to close the gap between existing legislation on VAWIP and its effective implementation. Brazil has indeed developed a legal and institutional framework to address political GBV, and this framework is gradually evolving to respond to the challenges posed by online harassment and technology-facilitated abuse.

Regarding VAWIP, Law 14.192/2021 was a landmark in criminalising VAWIP, defining acts of harassment, coercion and hostility directed at women because of their political participation. The Law applies both offline and online, giving prosecutors and courts clear instruments to investigate and sanction perpetrators. It also instructs the Superior Electoral Court (TSE) and Regional Electoral Courts (TRE) to run prevention campaigns and maintain Women's Ombuds Offices, offering victims a channel for reporting and redress. The TSE operates the Observatory of Women's Political Rights, collecting data and promoting prevention campaigns, while TREs run local ombuds offices (Tribunal Superior Eleitoral, 2024; Tribunal Regional Eleitoral de São Paulo, 2025). Women's Advocacy Offices in the National Congress, state assemblies, and municipal chambers receive complaints and monitor the implementation of gender equality policies, reinforcing democratic oversight (Câmara dos Deputados, 2025; Senado Federal, n.d.).

Regarding TF-GBV, Brazil has built legal frameworks since 2012 that help to address parts of the issue, but not the phenomenon itself. This process began with the Carolina Dieckmann Law (Law 12.737/2012), which criminalises unauthorised access to devices. It has continued with the *Marco Civil da Internet* (Civil Rights Framework for the Internet; Law 12.965/2014), which sets rights and liability architecture; and the *Lei Geral de Proteção dos Dados* (General Personal Data Protection Law; Law 13.709/2018), which shifts responses toward risk management, data security and breach reporting.

Criminal updates target behaviours that often constitute TF-GBV. For example, the Lola Aronovich Law (Law 13.642/2018) gives the Federal Police jurisdiction to investigate online dissemination of misogynistic content. Law 13.718/2018 criminalises non-consensual intimate imagery and related offences (with public prosecution even without a victim complaint); and Law 14.132/2021 typifies stalking, including online surveillance and persistent harassment. Collectively, these instruments let authorities act on hacking, doxxing, image-based abuse, stalking, and some platform liability – even though TF-GBV is not defined as a distinct legal category.

Despite this important legislative progress, the implementation of Brazil’s legal framework to address VAWIP remains deeply uneven. As one interviewee noted: ‘there are many laws, a lot approved on paper, but when it comes to execution, there’s a trivialisation’. Current legislation is often described as ‘punitive, restrictive, and incomplete’, failing to capture the complexity of contemporary forms of violence – particularly those facilitated by technology.

These shortcomings are exacerbated by weak institutional mechanisms within political parties and a sluggish judicial system, with cases taking months or even years to be resolved, which leaves women without timely protection. Implementation difficulties are particularly acute at the municipal level, where local authorities face limited capacity and resources. Some interviewees even raised concerns about institutional bias within law enforcement and judicial bodies, though such claims require further verification.

‘In the Women’s Prosecutor Office or in the Women’s Secretariat within the Chamber, none of the complaints that were filed were taken up or moved forward, which is completely different from the judiciary. This proves that in that political space they select who is a victim and who is not. So, if you don’t share my political views, then you are not a victim. You are only considered a victim or worthy of protection if you think like me.’

Non-white woman, right-wing party

In terms of digital protection, research highlights that Brazil’s legal and institutional framework remains fragmented, leaving significant gaps (Valente, 2023; Zaganelli, 2025; *Ministério dos Direitos Humanos e da Cidadania*, 2025). Online safety remains difficult to guarantee, particularly for women, girls and other vulnerable groups, who continue to face widespread harassment and limited access to effective prevention or redress mechanisms.

This concern was echoed by the women politicians interviewed for this study, many of whom emphasised that the absence of effective accountability mechanisms in digital spaces is one of the most pressing barriers to tackling TF-GBV. As one interviewee observed: ‘This virtual space has no rules’, highlighting how the absence of clear regulations enables violence to flourish unchecked.

Since 2023, the *Agência Nacional de Proteção de Dados* (Brazil’s National Data Protection Agency) has exercised enforcement powers and established incident-reporting channels that strengthen the country’s data protection framework. However, these measures cannot substitute for the development of clear, gender-responsive protocols across criminal, civil, and digital platform processes. CSOs such as SaferNet partially fill gaps, lowering reporting barriers, preserving evidence, and triggering removals, yet their capacity is finite and unevenly integrated into public systems.

As the sophistication of attacks continues to evolve with technological advancement, threats are evolving faster than protections. AI amplification makes fake content and harassment more sophisticated, while new technologies, in general, enable more convincing gendered disinformation campaigns (#ShePersisted, 2024). This technological arms race leaves both individual women and institutional responses struggling to keep pace with the emerging threats. Interviewees raised concerns about the normalisation of digital attacks by the very institutions supposed to take action.

One interviewee suggests that this dynamic was illustrated by the inaction of the Federal Police towards TF-GBV cases:

'1000+ cases were reported, but nothing was done until Supreme Court ministers were attacked themselves.'

White woman, left-wing party

Indeed, Brazil has only recently begun to regulate the spaces where harm is amplified at scale (namely, social media platforms), gaining growing global prominence in the process. In 2024, its platform regulation law project PL 2630/2020 (known as '*PL das Fake News*'), which had been stalled after years of dispute, was declared effectively dead – a situation that has been widely analysed as a case of successful Big Tech resistance, leaving no comprehensive horizontal regime for platform accountability.

In 2025, lawmakers shifted toward issue-specific bills: the child-online protection law ('*Lei Felca*', originating as PL 2.628/2022) was approved by Congress in August and sanctioned on 18 September 2025, creating affirmative duties for platforms, app stores and OS providers to mitigate risks to children and adolescents online. Meanwhile, the country's AI regulation remains in flux: a risk-based federal AI bill advanced in the Senate (PL 2.338/2023) with new proposals in the Chamber (e.g., PL 526/2025), but enactment and compliance parameters are still uncertain. Together with the Supreme Court's June 2025 recalibration of platform liability under Marco Civil Article 19, these moves signal a piecemeal turn, with measures around children's safety and AI governance advancing faster than a general platform regulation law.

Ultimately, despite notable legislative progress, Brazil's legal response to TF-GBV remains fragmented and is implemented inconsistently. Existing laws address specific dimensions of online and political violence but lack a comprehensive, harmonised definition of TF-GBV. This conceptual and procedural disconnect limits institutional coordination and undermines the coherence of prevention, protection, and response efforts across sectors.

As a result, the country's framework relies on a patchwork of criminal, civil and sector-specific measures, rather than an integrated, gender-responsive system that recognises the unique dynamics of TF-GBV, particularly as it affects women in politics. The strengthening of legal integration and the ensuring of consistent implementation remain essential to translate existing norms into effective protection and accountability.

Beyond parties: foster more democratic and inclusive environments for women in politics

Looking beyond actions that address VAWIP and TF-GBV directly, interviewees consistently report the need to improve the conditions for women's full participation in politics. Political parties demonstrate an overall awareness of the need to increase this participation. However, even though they are legally required to allocate 30% of the Special Campaign Financing Fund and a portion of the party fund to female candidates (Tribunal Superior Eleitoral, 2019), this recognition does not necessarily translate into effective practice.

The majority of parties (18 out of 20) were found to have some form of action to increase or improve women's political participation. Only two right-leaning parties showed no documentary evidence of such efforts on their websites or official materials. These initiatives range from basic awareness-raising about the importance of women in politics to campaigns designed to recruit women into political engagement, including educational materials, communication campaigns, and podcasts targeting potential female candidates.

In our interviews, however, only a few parties (PSOL, PSB) explicitly acknowledge the importance of considering the intersectional identities that create additional vulnerabilities for women in politics, particularly Black women, the LGBTQI+ community and people with disabilities. The results of our interviews suggest that this intersectional lens is not used systematically – although if asked, interviewees tend to say that these subgroups do face additional challenges.

Related to this, several political training and capacity-building programmes designed specifically for women were identified, although their depth and seriousness require separate analysis. A preliminary review reveals significant differences in programme sophistication: some parties offer brief video series (7-8 videos of two minutes each), while others present more comprehensive political training programmes for women.

Several of the party leaders interviewed mentioned capacity-building programmes operated either directly by their party or through affiliated foundations (PSB, *União Brasil*, *Podemos*, *Cidadania*, and *Novo*). These training initiatives represent recognition that women may face additional barriers to political participation and require specialised support to navigate political systems effectively. However, the variation in programme depth suggests uneven commitment to substantive capacity building, and assessment of the actual impact of these programmes requires a separate study.

One key element that would improve women's participation is access to adequate resources for viable women's candidacies: a critical concern mentioned by nearly all interviewees and acknowledged in the national literature (Gatto and Thome, 2024). This challenge is not unique to Brazil: it is documented elsewhere in Latin America (Sacchet, 2009) and across multiple countries and regions (Krook, 2009).

Several party leaders emphasised their commitment to the proper allocation of resources for female candidates to ensure compliance with the legal minimum of 30% women candidates. Some party representatives stress that their parties go beyond this legal requirement (PSOL, PSB, *Novo*). In contrast, interviewees from right-leaning parties emphasise particularly problematic patterns around quota compliance.

There is greater emphasis on electoral manipulation through abandonment and instrumentalisation, with women feeling that they are recruited then abandoned, used as 'necessary quotas' and treated as expendable numbers rather than genuine candidates. This reflects a focus on quota compliance where women's participation is viewed primarily through a legal compliance lens rather than as a matter of genuine inclusion. This may help to explain the difference in electoral success rates between ideological camps and suggest that formal commitments mask deeper structural resistance to women's political advancement, including the prevalence of patriarchal gender norms.

Indeed, an examination of current elected members in the Chamber of Deputies reveals that these efforts do not necessarily translate into tangible results. The share of elected women in the Chamber of Deputies averages 26% for left-leaning parties and only 15% for right-leaning parties, meaning that few parties actually elect more than 30% women (only PSOL and PCdoB achieve this threshold). This disparity between stated commitments and electoral outcomes highlights the difference between candidate recruitment and successful election, suggesting that resource allocation and support mechanisms remain insufficient to translate candidacies into electoral success.

More generally, interviewees understand that women's political participation is still constrained by traditional gender norms that operate as systemic and structural barriers. Women from left-leaning parties highlight the triple work burden of combining professional, political and domestic responsibilities, compounded by an inadequate childcare infrastructure, family opposition to political participation, and persistent societal expectations about women's primary roles as caregivers. These structural constraints limit women's ability to fully engage in political life and make them more vulnerable when they do participate.

Women from right-leaning parties similarly identify structural barriers to entry, including lack of political training opportunities, family opposition, and emotional challenges navigating political environments without adequate support systems. However, their framing tends to emphasise individual adaptation rather than systemic change, reflecting broader ideological differences about the nature of gender inequality.

Women from left-leaning parties, in particular, emphasise the intersectional challenges facing marginalised women, noting how Black women, LGBTQI+ individuals, and women from peripheral communities face compounded vulnerabilities in political spaces. They also highlight the normalisation of political violence as a systemic issue that requires collective action and institutional reform. This intersectional awareness appears less systematically developed among right-leaning parties, where individual experiences of discrimination may be acknowledged but are less likely to be connected to broader patterns of structural exclusion. This difference in analytical framework has a direct impact on how parties understand who is most vulnerable to TF-GBV and what types of responses are needed to address these challenges effectively.

5 Recommendations

This section translates the findings of the study into evidence-based recommendations to address VAWIP and TF-GBV. It offers a dual track, recognising that reform often stalls for lack of political will. Short- to medium-term recommendations give willing parties and institutions concrete steps they can implement now. Long-term recommendations – legal reforms and social-norm change – aim to build the structural and cultural conditions that generate sustained pressure and incentives to act.

Reflecting the project’s focus on political party responses, the recommendations emphasise actions within party structures and processes. However, they also underscore the crucial roles of public institutions and technology platforms in driving systemic and sustained change.

‘When there is an act of violence against a woman in politics, I think it requires a union of forces, regardless of political party or ideology, to support women.’

White woman, right-wing party

Some recommendations target both VAWIP and TF-GBV simultaneously, while others focus specifically on TF-GBV. To illustrate what is possible in practice, the recommendations are complemented by examples of existing initiatives identified through the research and interviews when applicable. These examples are not exhaustive but highlight the initiatives cited most frequently in the evidence gathered, offering valuable insights and potential models for replication.

The measures are mutually reinforcing and work best through coordinated action across parties, public institutions, civil society, academia, the private sector, donors, and communities. Together, they confront the urgency of political violence while advancing a broader goal: inclusive, equitable and resilient democratic institutions. The protection of women in politics is inseparable from advancing gender equality; progress requires both immediate remedies and long-term norm change so that women can participate, lead and thrive, strengthening democracy for all.

Short-medium term (next 12 months)

Actor	Focus	Recommendation	Description/justification
Political parties, public institutions	TF-GBV	Officially recognise TF-GBV as VAWIP with intersectional impacts	Political parties could adopt a short addendum to party statutes/codes that recognises TF-GBV explicitly (as distinct from but connected to VAWIP) and its intersectional impacts. These are shaped and often intensified by race/ethnicity, age, sexuality, gender identity, disability, and other vulnerabilities. As part of this process, pro-active conscientisation of senior party leaders, particularly men in relation to TF-GBV should be considered. Similarly, public institutions should consider adopting a unified and cross-referenced legal definition of TF-GBV across relevant statutes and legal frameworks.

Actor	Focus	Recommendation	Description/justification
Political parties	VAWIP, TF-GBV	Build party protocols for VAWIP and TF-GBV cases	Parties could develop step-by-step protocols that guide women through the actions and legal channels they can take when responding to cases of VAWIP and TF-GBV. One guiding example for developing a step-by-step protocol is the <i>'Cartilha sobre Violência Política de Gênero'</i> (Guide on Gender-Based Political Violence), published in 2021 by the <i>Observatório de Violência Política Contra a Mulher</i> . For intra-party cases of violence, protocols should include robust, enforceable accountability mechanisms for internal perpetrators, ensuring that incidents are addressed transparently and effectively, and that impunity is prevented.
Public institutions, law	TF-GBV	Integrate TF-GBV into political violence and platform regulation legislation	Building on the example of the recent amendment to the <u>Maria da Penha Law</u> , the existing Law on Political Violence Against Women (14.192/2021) should incorporate an amendment that defines and addresses TF-GBV explicitly. In parallel, legislators should take advantage of opportunities to embed TF-GBV in ongoing digital-protection and platform-regulation debates to require platforms to make coordinated TF-GBV a policy and enforcement priority.
Public institutions, law	VAWIP, TF-GBV	Create national guidelines and protection pathways	TSE should develop a clear, accessible guide outlining procedures for responding to cases of VAWIP and TF-GBV. This should be accompanied by public education campaigns on relevant laws and rights. Existing initiatives, such as the <i>'GT Observatório de Direitos Políticos Fundamentais da Mulher'</i> (Working Group on the Observatory of Women's Fundamental Political Rights) and the TSE's <i>'Observatório Permanente de Combate à Violência Política'</i> (Permanent Observatory to Tackle Political Violence) offer strong foundations upon which to build this effort.
Tech platforms	TF-GBV	Make coordinated TF-GBV a policy and enforcement priority	Platforms are not neutral conduits: their affordances (anonymity at scale, virality, amplification) are exploited routinely by organised actors (including bot-assisted smear networks) to target women in politics. For this reason, platforms should commit to treating TF-GBV against public figures as a high-risk harm and improve dedicated enforcement of responses to coordinated behaviour with takedown of networks (not just posts) and public strike counts for repeat-offender accounts, pages and groups. They should also establish direct channels with parties and authorities for more agile reporting and reaction in cases of severe TF-GBV (such as death threats or doxxing), ensuring timely accountability and protection for victims.
Political parties, Civil Society	TF-GBV	Build digital safety and strategic media skills	Parties (using public funds such as <i>fundo partidário</i>) and civil society could provide comprehensive digital literacy and security training for women in politics. This should include guidance on recognising and responding to online attacks, identifying bots and coordinated campaigns, and understanding the risks linked to personal identity. Professional advice on how to engage strategically with social media platforms would support women not only to protect themselves but also to use these tools to strengthen their political presence and leverage them effectively during campaigns.

Long term (1-3 years)

Actor	Focus	Recommendation	Description/justification
Public institutions, law	VAWIP, TF-GBV	Strengthen legal sanctions against perpetrators	Public institutions could adopt enforceable sanction protocols for perpetrators of VAWIP and TF-GBV. These measures should build on existing legal frameworks, such as Law No. 14.192/2021 and the Carolina Dieckmann Law (Law No. 12.737/2012). Public institutions should provide specialised training for law enforcement on VAWIP and TF-GBV and strengthen their investigative capacity. These efforts should be complemented by the further development and implementation of explicit legislation to hold the perpetrators of online violence accountable, and importantly, to regulate major technology platforms to ensure accountability.
Political parties, public institutions, civil Society	VAWIP, TF-GBV	Promote equitable social norms	Within their remit, stakeholders should advance equitable gender norms that legitimise women's public leadership and reduce VAWIP/TF-GBV. Political parties should model change by guaranteeing parity (50/50) in decision-making bodies and sustained resourcing of women's party sectors beyond electoral cycles, alongside concrete support for women's candidacies (training, mentoring, care-friendly structures). Public institutions should embed gender equality, GBV/VAWIP/TF-GBV awareness, and digital citizenship across curricula from early years through secondary school, with materials that normalise women's leadership. Civil society should partner on community programmes that engage young people (especially boys and young men) to respect women's leadership, challenge harmful masculinities, and shift expectations around care and work. Together, these actions align incentives and culture to address the norms that enable gendered political violence.
Public institutions, law, parties	VAWIP, TF-GBV	Extend efforts to address VAWIP and TF-GBV to local levels	Measures to prevent and address VAWIP and TF-GBV should be extended to the municipal level, where women often experience heightened isolation in councils with few female members. Public institutions should ensure that every city council has a dedicated women's prosecutor's office, particularly in areas without women's police stations, in order to expand local access to protection and justice. Existing offices in cities such as São Paulo , Curitiba , São Francisco de Paula , and Uberlândia , as well as those established in the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate , which also offer guidance on how to create new offices, provide strong models for replication. However, as of 2023, only 690 of Brazil's 5,568 city councils had established such offices, and at the state level they were operational in just 22 of 27 units, with 3 others considering their creation (Agência Senado, 2024). Initiatives such as PSOL's Campaign on Political Gender Violence in Parliament demonstrate how targeted local action can strengthen protection and support for women in these contexts.
Civil society	VAWIP, TF-GBV	Build suprapartisan women's alliances	Supra-partisan networks should be fostered to allow women in politics to share strategies, strengthen resistance, and collectively address VAWIP and TF-GBV, as seen in initiatives such as Instituto E Se Fosse Você? , MariaLab , MonitorA , and the Instituto Marielle Franco .

6 Conclusion

This study understands TF-GBV as a phenomenon rooted in social norms, as profoundly connected with GBV and as continuous across political careers rather than a phenomenon that simply spikes during elections and then fades away. It contributes to an understanding of TF-GBV as a systematic threat to democratic participation. Indeed, building on the Framework of Information Disorder (Ricard et al., 2025), the study conceptualises a mechanism chain in which enabling social norms are weaponised by motivated actors (e.g., political opponents, partisan media, far-right networks, anonymous users); disseminated through gendered and racialized narratives and tactics (e.g., sexualisation, questioning competence); and amplified by platform affordances and algorithms (e.g., hashtags, recommender systems).

Across the sample, all women face a baseline of gendered abuse, but race/ethnicity, gender identity, and age reconfigure who is targeted and the narratives deployed. Black and Indigenous women are attacked through racialised/colonial tropes; trans women experience compounded misogyny and transphobia; and cis white women are more often policed via ageism and appearance/moral judgements.

While there can be spikes in abuse during elections, it is visibility – rather than electoral timing – that is the best predictor of its intensity: attacks surge when women gain prominence (through holding high office, being involved in polarising agendas, clashing with powerful figures, or being part of major events). Coordinated networks (particularly on the far right) weaponise platform affordances to scale attacks, and the harmful impacts cascade from the personal (mental health, family threats) to the professional (security costs, opportunity loss) and democratic levels (deterrence, withdrawal, chilled speech).

The responses of political parties to TF-GBV in Brazil are shaped (and constrained) by gender norms and structural factors that render the phenomenon both conceptually blurred and institutionally under-addressed. Across the 20 parties reviewed, TF-GBV remains inextricable from GBV in party discourse, with no specific strategies, manifestos or policy documents dedicated to TF-GBV specifically.

The ideological framing of gender inequalities and VAWIP varies: parties on the left/centre-left emphasise patriarchy and intersectionality, while those on the right/centre-right invoke ‘societal *machismo*’ and biology. Yet both camps fail to comprehend how platform affordances reshape violence, often conflating online and offline dynamics.

Operationally, measures are reactive, fragmented, case-based (e.g., public statements, legal support, security steps), and are under-resourced. They function as ‘analogue solutions for a digital world’, treating digital abuse as a private – rather than democratic – problem. Internally, patriarchal party structures and limited women’s access to decision-making operate as gatekeeping mechanisms that blunt proactive action. At the system level, gaps in legislation and implementation, amid a fragmented legal landscape that lacks a unified definition of TF-GBV, further weaken prevention, protection and accountability. Collectively, they result in insufficient responses across the political spectrum.

Taken together, the evidence shows TF-GBV is not merely episodic ‘online incivility’ but rather a patterned form of political violence that leverages social norms, coordination, and platform mechanics to discipline women’s participation and erode democratic representation. Addressing it requires studying TF-GBV and GBV together, understanding how they reinforce and mutate, and resourcing proactive, multi-actor responses.

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Annex A

Telegram data and sampling

Telegram is the second most used messaging application in Brazil, with a penetration rate of nearly 60% (Statista, 2024), and has, therefore, a distinctive role in Brazil's social media ecosystem. Telegram groups and channels enable the rapid, large-scale dissemination of messages with minimal moderation, making it a critical arena for coordinated political communication and the circulation of abusive or disinformation narratives that are more difficult to detect and regulate (Júnior et al., 2021). This study used the tool 'TelegramScrap' (Silva, 2023), an open-source and authorial tool, to scrape messages from public groups on Telegram. The Telegram dataset analysed in this study was built using a multi-step filtering process applied to a large-scale database containing more than 115 million messages from public political, conspiracy, and neo-Nazi groups in Brazil. The filtering process operated as follows:

Step 1: Keyword query.

- *Query:* ['name' OR 'political position'] AND ['insult']
- *Process:* Three keyword lists were built: (i) 80+ women in politics (names/aliases), (ii) elected positions, (iii) insults directed at women (compiled from prior literature, news corpora, and pilot scoping; reviewed to exclude ambiguous terms).
- *Output:* ≈180,000 messages mentioning at least 1 target woman (by name or position) and containing at least one insult.

Step 2: Focal-case selection (15 politicians).

- *Process:* A dual quantitative and qualitative approach was adopted to select the 15 politicians whose mentions were to be manually analysed.

Quantitative: We manually screened a 20% sample of messages for the top 8 most-mentioned figures from Step 1 and selected the 3 most frequently targeted by attacks. Notably, all three were white congresswomen, which reflects both the greater visibility afforded by their roles and the structural inequalities in Brazilian politics, where white women remain overrepresented in National Congress in comparison to Black women (Oxfam Brasil, 2020).

Qualitative: An additional 12 politicians were included, based on two criteria: intersectional diversity and a recent case with nationwide repercussions. The goal was to achieve a balanced distribution of messages across the four subgroups, targeting approximately 300 attacks per subgroup. Despite efforts to achieve subgroup balance, the vast majority of mentions and attacks were directed at white women, with substantially fewer targeting non-white women. As a result, non-white right-wing women remained underrepresented as no significant volume of attacks was mapped against them (as can be observed in Table 1), a finding likely attributable to their limited overall visibility.

- *Output:* 6,426 messages from the selection above mentioning one of the 15 selected politician's names and containing at least one insult.

Step 3: Manual classification and coding.

- *Process:* messages were manually classified into 'attack' or 'not attack'. Messages classified as 'attack' were further coded using the TF-GBV classification outlined in Section 2.4., to estimate prevalence of types of attacks.
- *Output:* 1,165 messages classified as attacks.

Notes on preprocessing and ethics: We restricted collection to public groups/channels; removed exact duplicates/identical forwards; and anonymised user identifiers at analysis.

Interviews

A total of 28 semi-structured interviews were conducted with two key groups: 15 elected women in politics (including members of congress, state deputies, city councillors, and mayors) and 13 women party leaders drawn from local, state, and national party bodies and women's wings (among them a national party president; presidents of women's sections and members of national executive committees). In practice, the distinction between these groups was not always clear, as many elected women held leadership roles simultaneously within their parties. However, because two distinct questionnaires were used, each participant was assigned to a single group based on the relevance of the interview content and to maintain balance across subgroups.

A purposeful sampling strategy was employed to identify interview participants, with the aim of capturing rich, contextually grounded insights aligned with the research objectives (Patton, 2015). The sampling process considered multiple factors to ensure the relevance and diversity of the data: intersectional identity (white vs. non-white women); political affiliation (left-wing vs. right-wing); respondent type (women politicians vs. party leaders); and the recent visibility or national significance of their experiences.

The study sought to conduct at least five to six interviews per subgroup to guarantee representation from both elected women and party leaders, thereby capturing a broad spectrum of perspectives on TF-GBV and party responses. One methodological limitation was the difficulty of scheduling interviews with certain subgroups. In particular, despite sustained efforts over a three-month period (June to mid-August 2025) to recruit Black women affiliated with right-wing parties, no interviews were successfully conducted with this subgroup. In several cases, more than 20 contact attempts were made without success. As a result, this intersection of identity and political affiliation is not represented in the final sample.

As part of the ethical compliance commitment for this study, findings from interviews are reported anonymously and no interviewee is identified by name in this report. Transcripts from interviews were anonymised, and files followed a naming convention to ensure confidentiality. Only the research team had access to recordings. No personally identifiable information was included in this report. Insights and quotes are either presented in aggregate form or attributed to non-identifiable descriptors (e.g., 'white' or 'non-white', left or right wing). Parties' names are mentioned across the report but care has been taken to avoid stigmatisation.

Document review

We conducted a systematic review of the *estatutos* and official websites of the 20 parties currently represented in the Chamber of Deputies. For each party, references to 'gender' and 'women' were systematically identified, along with any provisions related to violence associated with these terms. The analysis examined both party statutes and websites, noting whether websites offered search functionality, and systematically counted mentions of the key terms. For 'gender', the total number of mentions within statutes was recorded, as well as the subset linked explicitly to violence. This process was then repeated for party websites. The same methodology was applied for the term 'women', distinguishing between general mentions and those referring specifically to violence.

In addition to the textual analysis, several organisational characteristics were mapped for each party, including whether the party had ever been led by a woman and whether dedicated women's wings or groups existed within its structure. These indicators were used as proxies for gender norms operating within each party, reflecting the extent to which women's leadership and participation are accepted, encouraged or symbolically represented. This study hypothesised that the presence (or absence) of women leaders, women's wings, and gender-related mechanisms is a relevant signal of the degree of institutional commitment to gender equality.

Additional data included the number of women currently in the Chamber of Deputies from each party (as of 2025), the total number of elected members, and the resulting percentage of women's representation. Additional contextual information was also gathered, including each party's year of creation, its age as of 2025, and its funding sources based on the 2025 party fund distribution. Policies relating to women and/or gender were documented, as were any institutional bodies or mechanisms for addressing and reporting GBV, including internal task forces. Finally, any party documents that addressed TF-GBV specifically were tentatively identified, and the findings were cross-referenced with interview data to validate and contextualise the documentary evidence. This allowed us to explore not only documentary evidence but also the ways in which formal commitments interact with party culture and gender norms in practice.

About ALiGN

ALiGN is a digital platform and programme of work that supports a global community of researchers, practitioners and activists, all committed to gender justice and equality. It provides new research, insights from practice, and grants for initiatives that increase our understanding of – and work to change – patriarchal gender norms.

ALiGN Programme

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Feminist activists raise their hands at a march in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 2018. © Alexandre S. R. Horta | Shutterstock ID: 1195896610.

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