

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AGAINST UNION MEMBERS IN PARAGUAY



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TECHNOLOGY- FACILITATED GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AGAINST UNION MEMBERS IN PARAGUAY

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1. INTRODUCTION

Women continue to occupy spaces that were not historically designed for them, and they persist in these spaces, transforming them through advances and setbacks. One such space is the Paraguayan labor movement. This process is not linear, and gender-based violence continues to act as a structural obstacle to equality in the workplace and in the union sphere. Far from disappearing, this violence adapts to technological changes, taking on new forms, methods and instruments of discipline.

This study examines Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV) in the Paraguayan union context. It is an exploratory study that seeks to identify the scope, types, attack vectors and profiles of TFGBV perpetrators, as well as its impacts on the well-being and career trajectories of women union members. The study is based on the premise that digital violence is not an isolated phenomenon, but rather part of a continuum of power asymmetries and sexist discrimination that already exist in offline settings.

The report first presents the theoretical and conceptual framework, which draws on the analysis of the “mandate of masculinity” (Segato); it then provides a historical and chronological overview of women’s participation and exclusion in the Paraguayan labor movement (from the postwar period of the 1870s to the present), incorporating a review of current international, regional and national standards. Second, it outlines the methodological design, which combines documentary analysis with quantitative data (surveys of women union members) and qualitative data (in-depth interviews with women leaders and union officials). Finally, the results are presented, examining the prevalence of forms of aggression such as defamation, workplace violence and internal surveillance; the profiles of the perpetrators (employers, peers and political actors); and the psychological, occupational and political repercussions on the activists.

The results and conclusions of this study aim to contribute to the democratic debate in Paraguay by providing insights for civil society organizations, primarily labor unions and women’s organizations. The analysis argues that TFGBV functions as a mechanism of political censorship and discipline that seeks to curb women’s leadership in collective representation, thereby weakening the cohesion of the labor movement and imposing structural barriers to democratic equality in the country.

2. THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Gender-based violence and power: A structural perspective

To fully understand gender-based violence in the union context, it is imperative to move beyond the reductionist view that interprets it as a sum of interpersonal incidents and to approach it theoretically as a phenomenon of an eminently structural nature. The United Nations (UN, 1993) defines violence against women as a manifestation of “historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women” (p. 2). This definition establishes that violence does not stem from individual impulses or random dynamics, but rather operates as a political and systemic mechanism designed to preserve women’s subordination.

Similarly, union activity constitutes, by its very nature, a collective and organized response by the working class to another structure of oppression: the economic system that subjects it to exploitation and the resulting deterioration of its material living conditions. Historically, the union emerged as a tool of resistance against the structural logic of capital that renders the workforce precarious. Therefore, the union context is intrinsically a space of political and economic struggle against domination.

It is at the intersection of these two structural matrices—class and gender—that the experience of working women is situated. Segato (2016) explains that gender-based violence acts as a disciplinary mechanism governed by a “mandate of masculinity”, which demands constant displays of strength to reaffirm men’s position of power before their peers. Consequently, when women actively break into the union sphere—a domain whose origins and exercise of power have historically been masculinized—violence is deployed as a tool of punishment and correction.

From this performative perspective, acts of aggression do not seek merely to harm the direct victim, but to issue a demobilizing warning aimed at all women workers who attempt to challenge collective representation. Women union leaders thus face a double contradiction: while they organize to fight against the structure that exploits their class, they suffer, both within and outside their organizations, digital and political violence that seeks to push them back into the private sphere. Digital harassment against women leaders is not merely a matter of everyday friction within union life, but the tangible expression of structural asymmetries that instrumentalize information technologies to neutralize women’s leadership and, ultimately, weaken the very cohesion of the union movement.

This dual pressure of class and gender does not exist in the abstract but is lived out in the concrete history of our country. In Paraguay, the relationship between labor exploitation and the control exerted over women has profoundly shaped the paths of union resistance. To understand how these inequalities translated in practice into the exclusion of women leaders, and how women workers organized their own defense strategies, it is essential to examine the history of the national labor movement. This historical overview allows us to identify the roots of a traditional order that, far from being static, has demonstrated a great capacity for adaptation over time, laying the groundwork for the situations we see today in the digital environment.

2.2. History, crisis of representation and women's participation in Paraguay's labor movement

The trajectory of the labor movement in Paraguay is characterized by a dialectical tension between organizational autonomy and state co-optation, exacerbated by periods of authoritarianism and an incomplete democratic transition in terms of labor rights. In this context, women's participation has followed diverse trajectories, oscillating between a prominent, visible role during times of crisis or reorganization, and structural subordination during periods of institutionalization or repression.

2.2.1. Origins and consolidation: Working women as historical agents (1870–1954)

Contrary to traditional androcentric historiography, Schwartzman Muñoz et al. (n.d.) explain that women were key players in the first reconfiguration of the working class in the postwar period of 1870. Faced with a drastic decline in the male population, the urban workforce came to consist mainly of women—market vendors, cigar makers and seamstresses—who led early labor protests, such as those by market vendors in 1875 and seamstresses in 1892.

This prominent role became institutionalized between 1916 and 1920 with the founding of segregated but highly militant unions, such as United Women Cigar Workers and the Central Market Women Vendors' Association. A milestone in organizational integration occurred after the 1936 Revolution with the creation of the National Confederation of Workers (CNT), where women led a significant proportion of the founding unions, linking the class struggle with emancipatory feminism through the Women's Union of Paraguay. However, the subsequent hegemony of the Colorado Party and the founding of the Paraguayan Confederation of Workers (CPT) in 1951 marked a structural setback: the labor movement underwent a drastic process of masculinization, excluding women from spaces for strategic decision-making.

2.2.2. Anti-Dictatorial resistance and democratic reorganization (1958–1994)

The Union Coordinating Committee (MCS, n.d.) notes that the 1958 General Strike represented a historic defeat that led to the dictatorship's police intervention in the CPT, the dismantling of its class-conscious leadership and its subsequent co-optation, transforming it into a pro-government body aligned with the regime. In the face of the state's co-optation of the union structure, the social struggle shifted toward clandestine resistance and independent sectors, where women assumed a leading role.

The Report of the Truth and Justice Commission (2008, as cited in Schwartzman Muñoz et al., n.d.) highlights this participation by revealing that 37% of the women who were victims of the dictatorship belonged to the Agrarian Leagues. This points to a "feminization of activism" around 1975, even though, paradoxically, they remained excluded from leadership positions. This sustained resistance in rural areas and in strategic urban unions (such as the banking and nursing unions) enabled the labor movement, by the early 1980s, to begin a new phase of reorganization through the Inter-Union Workers' Movement (MIT) and the Paraguayan Women's Coordinating Committee, bringing together the forces that ultimately challenged the dictatorship in its final stages.

The fall of the dictatorship in 1989 led to a drastic change in the union landscape, characterized by unprecedented expansion. This phenomenon was not merely qualitative but also had a striking statistical impact: when comparing the figures from 1987 with those from 1990, there was a 187% increase in the number of union organizations and a 361% rise in the number of members (Céspedes, 2009, as cited in González Bozzolasco, 2025)

This massive accumulation of forces enabled the reorganization that culminated in the 1994 General Strike. From the perspective of labor activism, this event represents the peak of the working class's power in recent history, achieving an effective shutdown and temporarily halting neoliberal reforms.

2.2.3. Critical analysis of the contemporary crisis: Atomization and political factors

Despite the accumulation of forces in the 1990s, the Paraguayan labor movement subsequently entered a phase of critical fragmentation. González Bozzolasco (2020) argues that Paraguay has the lowest unionization rate in the region (6.7% in 2016), characterized by a structural dualism: a public sector with higher union density (28%) contrasted with a fragmented (0.6%) and precarious private sector.

Internal political analysis documents, such as those produced by the Union Coordinating Committee (MCS), argue that this “chronic weakness” is not solely due to macroeconomic variables, but rather to a crisis of political leadership defined by three factors:

Ethical crisis and co-optation: It is alleged that sectors of the longstanding leadership engaged in opportunistic and corrupt practices, prioritizing individual interests over collective ones, which led to the delegitimization of the labor confederations in the eyes of their rank-and-file members.

Bureaucratization: The replacement of assembly-based democracy with bureaucratic leadership structures distanced the unions from workers' real needs, limiting their ability to respond to labor market flexibilization.

Criminalization of protest: Union organizations denounce the existence of a policy of modern “State Terrorism”, characterized by the judicialization of social leaders as a mechanism for political discipline.

2.2.4. Gender intersectionality in the union crisis

The crisis of representation impacts women workers differently. Internal assessments within class-conscious unionism explicitly recognize the existence of “double exploitation” (labor and domestic) and the prevalence of sexual harassment in the workplace, realities that are often not prioritized by traditional leadership.

Generally speaking, women's access to strategic leadership remains blocked by personalistic and top-down organizational cultures that perpetuate gender inequalities. However, it is essential to emphasize that this exclusion is not absolute; women play a structurally decisive role. When organizations break with bureaucratic logic and enable genuine participation by the rank and file, women take on a leading role both within the organizational structure and in day-to-day activism, spearheading the resistance. (Schvartzman Muñoz et al., n.d.; MCS, n.d.).

2.3. Persistence despite exclusion: Women in the labor market and the union movement

As evidenced by the historical overview, women are already integrated into the labor market and union life, demonstrating remarkable persistence despite machismo and systematic exclusion. However, despite this continued presence, women enter both the world of productive work and union activity in spaces that were historically defined as masculine (Federici, 2018).

This entry into the union sphere is marked by a profound disadvantage, as working women carry a double burden: paid work and domestic and care responsibilities. Due to structural inequalities and the domestic and private roles assigned to them, women face a hostile labor landscape where they earn lower wages, hold lower-level positions and suffer the constant penalty of caregiving responsibilities (ECLAC, 2019).

In the face of these material inequalities, union organization emerges as the natural tool for defense. An emblematic case in Paraguay combines gender-based violence with technological changes in the world of work. Women's entry into digital transportation and delivery platforms takes place within a context of very concrete harm, evidenced by multiple reports of harassment, death threats and attempted rape by those requesting the service. In February 2024, tired of receiving no meaningful response or effective protection from a platform—following repeated attempts to rape several women drivers—a group of women called *Kuña Pópe*¹ organized to seek justice on their own and protect themselves. The testimonies of the workers involved help reconstruct this process of organization and the strategies they developed given the platform's lack of response (Alvear, 2026). This case set an important precedent for promoting debate and a regulatory process that safeguards the rights of people working in the platform economy; it also highlighted the need for specific organizing efforts against gender-based violence in this line of work (Alvear, 2025).

Since the union is a space for political participation and the exercise of public power, women's involvement in it challenges the cultural mandate that confines them to the domestic sphere (Pateman, 1995). This challenge triggers mechanisms of resistance that result in specific forms of violence.

One of the critical aspects in the study of violence against women union members is its multidirectional nature. Unlike other types of workplace harassment, here the perpetrators come from different strata of the power structure (ILO, 2019).

Employer violence: Perpetrated by the employer as direct retaliation for the worker's union activity.

Peer violence: Perpetrated by male colleagues within the same organization who perceive the presence of women at decision-making spaces as an intrusion into a "men's space", in accordance with the mandate of masculinity (Segato, 2016).

Institutional violence: That perpetrated by the union's own bureaucratic structures, which omit, minimize or render gender-related demands invisible.

A clear example of this last dimension in Paraguay is evident in the study by Sequera and Acuña (2023), who collected testimonies from journalists who alleged a lack of union support in response to reports of online harassment. Although the Paraguayan Journalists' Union (SPP) has provided support in certain cases, the survey results showed that, among union members, only a fraction

1 "Kuña Popé" means "In the hands of a woman" in Guaraní.

indicated that their organizations keep track of TFGBV cases (Sequera & Acuña, 2023, p. 23). This is despite the fact that previous SPP reports highlighted cyber harassment as one of the most frequently reported forms of aggression against women media workers (p. 7).

This scenario of persistence in the face of historical exclusion creates a landscape where violence does not disappear but rather transforms. With the emergence of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), power structures—both on the employer side and within union bureaucracies—are finding new channels for discipline, shifting mechanisms of punishment from the physical world to the digital arena.

2.3.1. Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence

Given that gender-based violence is a mechanism of social control, it is essential to characterize its manifestation in virtual environments. Based on this structural violence, technology emerges not as a new phenomenon, but as a tool that enables its expansion.

Definitions of technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) are still evolving. In fact, this terminology was agreed upon relatively recently, replacing the term “violence against women and girls in digital contexts” (UN, 2025, p. 5). A definition adopted by the United Nations is “any act that is committed, assisted, aggravated, or amplified by the use of information communication technologies or other digital tools, that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual, psychological, social, political, or economic harm, or other infringements of rights and freedoms” (UN, 2022, p. 4).

In a more conceptual sense, we understand TFGBV “as a continuum of the sexist violence that women already suffer in offline settings” (García and Sequera, 2021; APC, 2015). The structure of domination analyzed by Segato finds a new arena for its manifestation in digitalization. Under this logic, TFGBV must be conceptualized as a phenomenon that transcends the use of digital devices, constituting a continuum of analog violence and preexisting structural discrimination.

As part of ongoing efforts to better understand this phenomenon, Carrillo (2024) advanced its characterization by noting, for example, that its distinctive feature is not only the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) as a means of perpetration, but also its profound gendered intent: these attacks are deliberately directed at women and people with non-normative identities with the ultimate goal of restoring and reinforcing patriarchal power structures.

Another distinctive feature is that this violence manifests itself through a network of coercion and control that seeks to limit the autonomy of the targeted individuals. Through the reproduction of stereotypes and traditional roles, TFGBV operates as a form of symbolic and psychological violence that uses humiliation and discrediting to strip victims of their authority and sense of security. This dynamic often relies on constant threats, harassment and defamation, creating a hostile environment that forces victims into self-censorship. (Carrillo, 2024)

This form of violence relies on the systematic violation of privacy and security, ranging from the manipulation of devices to the non-consensual disclosure of personal information. These acts not only violate fundamental rights such as freedom of expression but also have a multidimensional impact on survivors’ emotional, physical, social and economic well-being.

Finally, TFGBV acts as a mirror that reproduces and exacerbates asymmetrical power relations. By relying on an unequal distribution of resources and influence, this type of violence fosters a culture of impunity that perpetuates structural inequality, turning the digital space into an instrument for political and social discipline that punishes any attempt to subvert established gender hierarchies.

Digital attacks against women in public life are not typically critiques of their performance, but rather attacks based on gender stereotypes, sexualized misinformation and belittlement of their abilities.

Regarding the impact of TFGBV on women workers, the ITUC further noted that this impact is “disproportionate” and that it “further entrenches structural inequalities in the labour market, acts as barriers to women’s participation and advancement in the labour market, and reinforces gender-based discrimination and economic insecurity” (ITUC, 2025)

2.4. Legal framework

The regulatory framework governing TFGBV against women in union activities requires a systematic, top-down analysis. This approach ranges from global agreements to Paraguayan domestic law, structured according to the principle of legal hierarchy and conventionality control.

This framework seeks not only to identify the applicable legal standard but also to understand how the law must evolve to protect union participation in an environment where the digital sphere is now the main arena for the struggle for representation.

2.4.1. International standards and the universal system

At the universal level, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) imposes on the Paraguayan State the obligation to act with due diligence to eliminate barriers that prevent women’s participation in public and political life. The CEDAW Committee, through its General Recommendations, has emphasized that access to spaces of collective representation is an indispensable condition for real equality. Within this framework, digital attacks aimed at undermining the legitimacy of organized women workers constitute a direct violation of these international commitments, as digital activists have denounced in successive shadow reports on the country.

This protective framework is directly linked to the Fundamental Conventions of the International Labour Organization (ILO). ILO Convention No. 87 on Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise, together with ILO Convention No. 98 on the Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining, strictly prohibit any act of discrimination or anti-union retaliation. In the contemporary era, TFGBV against grassroots union leaders and activists must be interpreted as a sophisticated anti-union practice; a targeted attack that seeks to fragment collective solidarity through the stigmatization and digital isolation of its representatives.

This global perspective is definitively updated by ILO Convention No. 190 on Violence and Harassment (2019). Its Article 3 marks a conceptual milestone by explicitly recognizing that the world of work is not limited to the physical space of the factory or office, but directly encompasses communications that take place through information and communication technologies (ICT). By classifying online harassment and other forms of digital harassment as psychosocial occupational risks, Convention No. 190 obligates States and employers to design safe virtual environments. Paraguay’s failure to ratify this convention represents a critical regulatory gap that leaves acts of aggression in digital environments in a troubling gray area of impunity.

As a corollary to the debates on the lack of protection in digital environments, on June 12, 2026, the International Labour Conference adopted the Decent Work in the Platform Economy Convention, marking a milestone by formally recognizing that technological innovation cannot operate to the detriment of the rights of the working class. This binding instrument establishes a minimum standard of non-negotiable rights, such as fair job classification, timely payment, access to social

security and the right to refuse hazardous work without facing retaliation. Fundamentally, the convention enshrines absolute protection against violence and harassment—both online and offline, including when perpetrated by third parties—and requires the implementation of accessible and effective complaint mechanisms, setting an indispensable regulatory precedent to curb violations within internet ecosystems.

2.4.2. Inter-American System

At the regional level, the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women (Belém do Pará Convention, 1994) serves as the cornerstone for holding the State accountable for conduct that causes harm or suffering to women, in both the public and private spheres. Although drafted in the analog era, its due diligence mandate requires an evolutionary interpretation to extend its protections to cyberspace, recognizing that virtual environments are now an extension of the public sphere where women exercise their civil and union rights.

Complementarily, the standards developed by the Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (RFOE-ACHR, 2018) provide a fundamental analytical framework for the union context. The Rapporteurship has determined that digital attacks targeting women who speak out publicly—such as journalists, human rights defenders and union representatives—are not isolated incidents, but rather deliberate attempts at censorship aimed at expelling them from public debate. These attacks instrumentalize sexualized disinformation and hate speech to create a “chilling effect”, forcing union activists into self-censorship and silencing the demands of the sectors they represent.

2.4.3. Emerging standards (The MESECVI paradigm)

The most significant and specialized normative development in the region is the Inter-American Model Law to Prevent, Punish and Eradicate Gender-Based Digital Violence against Women, adopted in December 2025 by the Committee of Experts of the Follow-up Mechanism to the Belém do Pará Convention (MESECVI, 2025). This emerging instrument was created with the explicit purpose of providing the member states of the Organization of American States (OAS) with a unified legislative framework, establishing that terms such as “online violence”, “cyberviolence” and “telematic violence” should be interpreted under the umbrella concept of gender-based digital violence.

The Model Law grounds its scope in guiding human rights principles, such as victim-centeredness, intersectionality, due diligence and, crucially, technological neutrality, ensuring that legal protections do not become obsolete in the face of new software developments or communication platforms. Its main contribution lies in proposing a comprehensive approach that goes beyond mere criminal punishment, requiring States to implement policies for prevention, digital education, expedited protective measures for the removal of harmful content and redress mechanisms that involve the accountability and governance of internet intermediary companies.

However, as Achucarro (2026) critically analyzes, the process of drafting this Model Law was marked by intense collective debates among expert officials and civil society organizations focused on digital rights in Latin America. The main tension identified revolves around the risks of blind punitivism and the potential impacts on freedom of expression and due process. Technofeminist doctrine warns that the creation of overly broad or ambiguous criminal offenses related to digital violence can end up being counterproductive.

In the Paraguayan context, this warning became particularly relevant during the discussion of the failed Online Harassment Bill in the National Congress in 2023; an initiative that, as Achucarro (2026) describes, was ultimately rejected because its imprecise definitions opened the door to discretionary interpretations and disproportionate responses that jeopardized the legitimate discourse of the activists and women workers themselves on social media. Therefore, the adoption of MESECVI standards in Paraguay should not focus on increasing prison sentences, but rather on creating protocols for civil and labor protection and the secure preservation of digital evidence, ensuring proportionality and safeguarding the right to free expression.

2.4.4. Regional Context

The legal recognition of technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) in Latin America reflects a gradual transition. Over the past decade, States have moved away from viewing cyberspace as a territory exempt from regulation and have begun to criminalize specific behaviors that infringe upon women's privacy, psychological integrity and right to work. The following is an overview of the most significant legislative milestones that shape the current regional standard of protection.

URUGUAY: Law No. 19580 on Gender-Based Violence Against Women. The Uruguayan model represented a qualitative leap by combining comprehensive protection with punitive measures. The most significant aspect of this law was Article 92, which mandated an amendment to the Uruguayan Penal Code through the incorporation of Article 277 BIS. This new article criminalized the dissemination of images or recordings containing intimate content without consent as a specific offense. Uruguay demonstrated that comprehensive laws must be integrated with the criminal justice system to effectively deter reputation-damaging campaigns.

MÉXICO: “Ley Olimpia” (Federal Reforms). After beginning as a state-level movement in 2018, federal reforms were enacted in Mexico in 2021, consolidating the regional framework known as “Olimpia. Law” Its most notable feature was the amendment to the Federal Penal Code to criminalize “Violation of Sexual Privacy”, imposing prison sentences on anyone who records, photographs, prints or disseminates intimate sexual content without consent. This framework emerged as the region's leading punitive model, influencing women's movements across the continent.

ARGENTINA: Law No. 27736, “Ley Olimpia Argentina”. Inspired by the Mexican model but adapted to its own legal framework, Argentina amended its Comprehensive Protection Law (Law 26485). The most notable aspect of this reform is that, unlike Mexico's strictly criminal law approach, Argentina incorporated “Digital or Telematic Violence” as a new, formally recognized category of violence. The law prioritizes prevention and digital education and, crucially, grants judges the authority to order digital platforms to immediately remove harmful content, thereby curbing the spread of harm.

CHILE: Law No. 21643, “Ley Karin”. At the forefront of contemporary digital and labor rights, Chile amended its Labor Code. The central aspect of this law is the obligation imposed on both private employers and state institutions to establish protocols for the prevention of workplace and sexual harassment, explicitly recognizing that these forms of violence can be perpetrated through digital means. This law formalizes the incorporation of ILO Convention No. 190 and shifts the responsibility for preventing online harassment to employer organizations.

2.4.5. Paraguayan Legislation

When applied to domestic law, the basis for legal protection lies in the 1992 National Constitution. Articles 46 and 48 enshrine the principles of equality and non-discrimination, imposing on the State the explicit obligation to remove obstacles that prevent substantive equality, which, under current conditions, requires active intervention to address the barriers created by the gender digital divide. Article 33, which guarantees the right to privacy, dignity and protection of one's image, provides the appropriate constitutional foundation for combating practices such as doxing and smear campaigns aimed at destroying the reputation of unionized women workers. This framework is reinforced by Article 96, which guarantees freedom of association, establishing that any online harassment seeking to weaken women's representation violates internal democracy and the constitutional right to association.

At the level of ordinary legislation, Law No. 5777/2016 on the Comprehensive Protection of Women against All Forms of Violence constitutes the specific tool within the Paraguayan legal system. Article 6 formally defines telematic violence in subsection 'k', criminalizing the production or dissemination of messages, data or images that affect women's dignity, privacy or honor through ICTs. However, an analysis of this regulatory framework reveals severe operational limitations when applied to the union sector. As Cuevas and Sequera (2024) note, digitalization has reshaped the methods of political and labor persecution, allowing attacks to transcend the physical space of the union and take place continuously.

Furthermore, there is a risk that Law 5777/16 will be subject to interpretive distortion (Sequera, 2024). If justice system officials lack technical training and a gender perspective, they may distort the law's purpose to censor legitimate complaints filed by women workers or stifle public debate under the false pretense of protection. For women union members, the power of this provision lies in its cross-referencing with workplace violence (subsection 'g') and political violence (subsection 'h'), recognizing that the online attacks they suffer have a dual nature: they are workplace-related because they happen within the context of their union duties and they are political because of their clear intent to exclude them from union decision-making spheres.

With regard to the broader wage-earning workforce, the Labor Code (Law No. 213/1993) provides, in Article 317, for union protection to safeguard union representatives against arbitrary dismissals and employer reprisals. Although the lawmakers of 1993 did not anticipate the dynamics of cyber harassment, labor case law must apply a teleological interpretation of Article 84 of the statute, which empowers workers to terminate their employment contract in the event of insults or serious acts of disrespect by the employer. This analogical extension is essential to prevent digital harassment campaigns and employer cyberespionage from becoming mechanisms for indirect or forced dismissal that fraudulently circumvent the protections afforded by union immunity.

Finally, for the public sector, the recent Law No. 7445/2025 on Civil Service introduces a revised disciplinary framework that prioritizes the personal integrity of women public employees and the maintenance of healthy work environments. Under this legislation, the use of digital platforms for harassment among peers or by superiors is no longer considered ambiguous conduct but is classified as a direct violation of institutional ethics. By dispelling the mistaken notion that digital harassment is a "private matter", the law links a safe virtual environment to the proper functioning of the State. Career stability in the civil service is established as a strategic safeguard against telematic defamation used to force the transfer or resignation of qualified women professionals in leadership positions. However, the law suffers from critical operational gaps, given the absence of protocols for preserving digital evidence and the lack of specific guidelines addressing the vulnerability of grassroots union delegates to coordinated mass attacks.

Current research on the subject may yield data confirming that TFGBV is not a sporadic phenomenon, but rather a structural barrier that causes women in Paraguay to abandon their union and public service careers prematurely. While definitive local data is not yet available, international experience offers a troubling mirror. In countries with similar union contexts, it has been found that cyber harassment significantly reduces women's participation in assemblies and that doxing is used to intimidate the families of women leaders.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a mixed-methods design (qualitative and quantitative) with an exploratory and descriptive scope. A methodological triangulation strategy was implemented to cross-reference data on the magnitude and frequency of incidents (via surveys) with in-depth insights into meanings, trajectories and subjective and organizational impacts (via interviews).

3.1. Participants and selection criteria

Sample selection was purposive (non-probabilistic), based on the following inclusion criteria: a) being a woman (cis or trans); b) maintaining active union membership or activism in Paraguay; and c) using information and communication technologies (ICT) in their work or union activities.

3.2. The study incorporated two levels of participation:

QUANTITATIVE SAMPLE: This consisted of 30 unionized women with varying levels of involvement. Forty percent of them hold the highest-ranking position in their union organization, either General Secretary or President; 5% hold the vice-presidency; another 40% serve on the Executive Committee; and the remaining 15% are grassroots activists or members.

QUALITATIVE SAMPLE: This consisted of 6 women in leadership, spokesperson or active union representation roles. All were from national union organizations.

- ◆ Two presidents of union confederations.
- ◆ Two members of the Executive Committee responsible for the Women's Secretariat in their respective unions.
- ◆ Two General Secretaries.

To ensure the diversity of work contexts, participants were selected from both public- and private-sector unions; those from the public sector constituted the majority, reflecting the overall composition of the union movement in our country. Additionally, an organization was included that brings together workers around the demand for social security and is structured as an association. Most of the unions covered in the study have a national presence.

3.2.1. Data collection techniques and instruments

The data collection process was carried out using two complementary instruments:

- ◆ **Self-administered survey (quantitative):** A structured questionnaire was implemented via the LimeSurvey platform. The instrument measured operational variables such as the level of access to devices, the frequency of use of digital platforms for union work and the prevalence of specific types of TFGBV (harassment, interception of communications, doxing, dissemination of false information, among others). The use of this specific platform complied with digital security protocols for handling sensitive information.
- ◆ **Semi-structured interviews (Qualitative):** A thematic guide was used to explore six areas: 1) histories of union and political participation; 2) habits regarding access to and use of technologies; 3) direct or indirect experiences of TFGBV; 4) personal, occupational and psychological impacts; 5) organizational consequences (union dynamics); and 6) institutional responses and prevention mechanisms. The interviews made it possible to reconstruct the process of online harassment and its effects on women's union participation.

3.3. Ethical and confidentiality considerations

The data collection procedure strictly adhered to the guidelines of feminist research ethics. For both methods (survey and interview), an informed consent protocol was implemented that clearly outlined the study's objectives, data processing and the right to withdraw from the study at any stage of the process.

Given the sensitive nature of the testimonies and the latent risk of revictimization or political and workplace reprisals, the strict anonymity of the participants and the confidentiality of their home organizations were guaranteed. In processing the interviews, pseudonyms were used and contextual elements (names of institutions, specific job titles) that could facilitate the indirect identification of the women leaders were obscured. Likewise, the quantitative data collection via LimeSurvey ensured the encryption and de-identification of the IP addresses associated with the responses.

3.4. Methodological limitations

The mixed-methods design presents two limitations inherent to its exploratory nature. First, the size of the quantitative sample (n=30) does not aim for statistical inference or representativeness of the total population of unionized women in Paraguay, but rather for the descriptive identification of patterns of TFGBV in this specific sector. Second, the data collection strategy relied on digital tools, which introduces an access bias: women with greater connectivity gaps or lower digital literacy (who may experience different manifestations of violence) are less likely to have been captured by the study's instruments.

4. RESULTS

4.1. The “mandate of masculinity” and the limits of representation

The women interviewed report that their opinions in assemblies or discussion groups are often dismissed. E2 explains how she had to “fight twice as hard” as general secretary because her male colleagues viewed her contributions as “just a complementary comment”. For her part, E5 points out that in online groups, women are told to shut up with phrases like “what can you possibly know” or by being told they “don’t have the balls” to confront those in power.

At the same time, a segregation of roles is evident. Historically, women have been relegated to support roles. E5 recalls that in the early days, women were assigned to “logistics” (making posters, organizing assemblies), while the front lines and the general secretariats were the exclusive domain of men. Although this has improved, the imbalance persists (e.g., 2 women versus 9 men in the union’s leadership).

The inclusion of women in the union leadership poses a direct challenge to the traditional Paraguayan leadership model. E4, as president of a union confederation, emphasizes that the union movement is a “hostile world geared toward men”, where the figure of the *tendota* (the charismatic and authoritarian leader) predominates. She further argues that women bring a more horizontal style of leadership, based on teamwork and consensus, which generates resistance and rejection from traditional leaders who refuse to be led by a woman.

An interesting emerging finding is how women organize to protect their spaces from male co-optation. The case of E6 is paradigmatic; her union rejected the proposal to open it to men (making it a mixed-gender space). Women union officials argued that, in times of persecution, men had turned their backs on them, and they feared that if men were allowed in, “they would quickly displace us and exploit our unions”. Maintaining women-only spaces emerges as a strategy for political survival.

The union and political system demands a “double effort” from women and exacts a very high personal toll, which hinders generational succession. In this regard, E6 mentions the “magic wand” that women need to balance home, work and an activism that is intense and demanding.

Despite hostility from the leadership, at the grassroots level women are identified as the driving force behind union resistance in times of crisis. E2 acknowledges that, in her union, the most vulnerable sector—the cleaning workers—“were always the *mbarete*” (the strongest), being the first to resist the employers’ attacks. Likewise, in highly feminized unions like the one E3 belongs to, women’s participation is the sole pillar sustaining the defense of labor rights in the face of cutbacks.

4.2. Scope, forms and context of TFGBV

Digital presence is a constant in contemporary union work: more than 90% of survey participants stated that their role includes tasks in digital environments or digital presence. In this context, TFGBV emerges as a latent and widespread risk. Thus, 48.5% of respondents (14 of the 31 responses recorded for this item) reported having directly experienced TFGBV, while 66.6% know another colleague who has suffered it. Furthermore, 71% maintain that this violence has been on the rise in recent times.

TFGBV against women union members in Paraguay does not manifest uniformly but takes on multiple forms that vary depending on the victim's level of exposure and the institutional context. Far from being isolated incidents, the findings demonstrate a close continuity between the physical and digital spaces: attacks originate simultaneously in both spheres, or begin offline and are amplified in the digital environment with equal statistical weight.

Based on a cross-sectional analysis of quantitative and qualitative data, the following dimensions and types of TFGBV operating within union organizations have been identified:

4.2.1. Defamation, reputational damage and workplace violence

The most widespread manifestations of TFGBV combine attacks on reputation with harassment in the workplace. Both defamation through false online information and workplace violence—understood as systematic and prolonged psychological harassment intended to harm, isolate or force a worker to resign—rank equally at the top in terms of prevalence (6 mentions each).

Direct digital attacks focus on insults and stigmatization based on gender stereotypes (4 responses). Qualitative analysis reveals that when women assume high-level leadership positions (such as general secretaries or presidents of union confederations), these attacks become more sophisticated and take on a marked misogynistic bias, which uses women's bodies and morality as political weapons. This moral scrutiny is directed exclusively at women. A leader of a national union confederation reflects on this double standard:

“They attack me... How? Because I'm single, because of this, because of that. They don't attack men for that” (E4).

The most extreme case documented in this study involved the theft of intimate data from a work computer at a state-owned company to generate rumors of a sexual nature. The affected leader recounts how her union detractors “took my photos... and spread them throughout the entire institution, saying that I was the general secretary's mistress” (E5), even going so far as to publish the images in national tabloid media.

The intent behind this aggression went beyond the simple goal of reducing her to a sexual object; it was a calculated strategy to instrumentalize the very machismo of the social and workplace environment. The aggressors used the leader's status as a woman as a political weapon, aware of society's sexist prejudices and moral double standards. By stigmatizing her, the ultimate goal was to undermine and delegitimize the entire executive committee, break the organization's resistance and facilitate the imposition of a new, more compliant union leadership aligned with those currently in power at the institution.

4.2.2. Internal surveillance

Although digital surveillance (the constant monitoring of public or private activities and data) appears less frequently in the overall survey sample, in-depth interviews reveal that it is one of the most prevalent forms of surveillance within union activities, yet also one of the most overlooked and normalized.

Instant messaging tools such as WhatsApp groups, originally conceived as safe spaces for grassroots coordination and organization, have been instrumentalized as tools for corporate control and espionage. Several women leaders from the public and private sectors agreed that information-leaking networks exist, in which peers themselves act as informants for management. A General Secretary from the public sector recounts:

“The conversations we had within the team were screenshotted and sent to the bosses” (E5).

This infiltration erodes trust within the union and forces women to engage in self-censorship or to technically restrict their participation in these channels, configuring messaging groups so that only administrators can post information because the employer has co-opted some of their colleagues (E2).

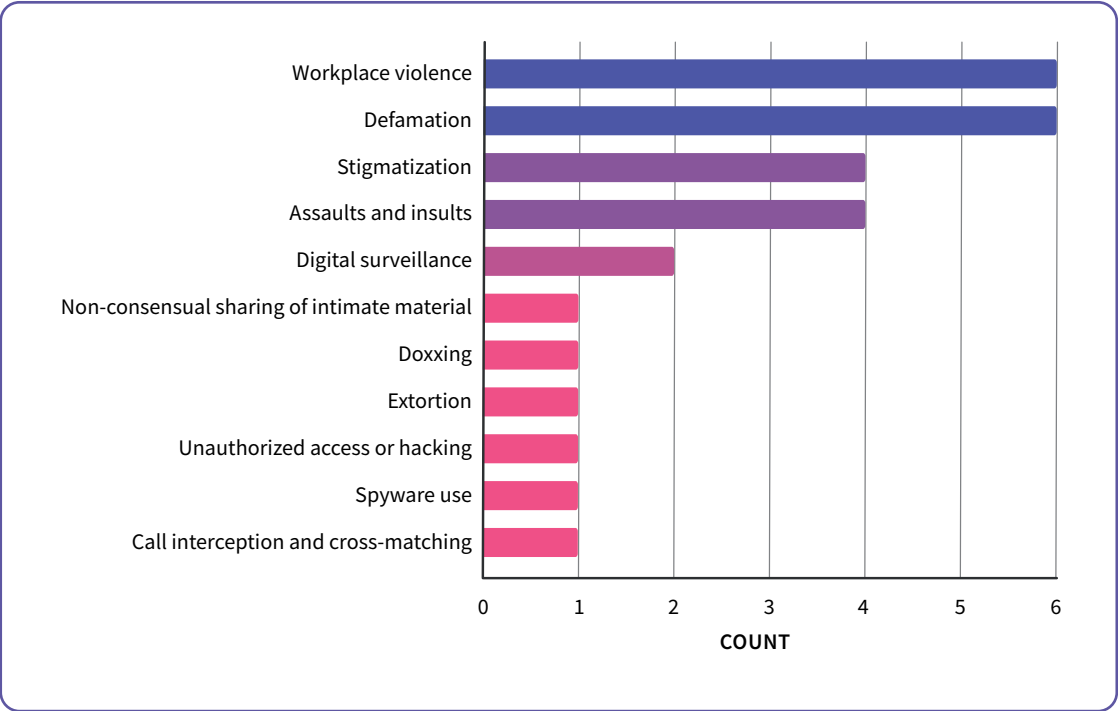


FIGURE 1. Chart based on the question “What forms of TFGBV did you experience?”.

Source: Survey conducted by the authors.

4.2.3. Modus operandi and attack vectors

Online harassment through coordinated and organized attacks (5 responses) predominates over individual attack from a single profile (3 responses). Furthermore, although the violence is usually occasional and linked to specific circumstances or individual posts, a critical group of union members reports persistent attacks occurring on a weekly and monthly basis. Five women report receiving continuous attacks without a clear pattern, and three of them have been the targets of systematic smear campaigns on social media.

This translates into two specific technological vectors identified in the testimonies:

- ◆ **Algorithmic censorship:** The president of a ministry workers' union reported that her videos exposing labor precarity were systematically taken down: "They even had my TikTok post taken down, several times... when I posted complaints about the situation facing public employees" (E6). We infer that this took place through the use of mass reporting.
- ◆ **Automation and political disinformation:** A teachers' union leader described coordinated attacks in which "they set up coordinated groups, some with specific patterns... and they tell you, 'What are you going to say, you leftist, you communist?'" (E1). The creation of coordinated groups and automated accounts for political harassment. At high levels of representation, the use of impersonation through photomontages was documented to simulate fake candidacies and sow distrust among the union rank and file (E4).

This technological evolution in attacks against the freedom of expression of union members, which take the form of harassment campaigns operating through coordinated networks, could indicate that the perpetrators have technical resources, time and funding at their disposal.

4.2.4. Amplification channels

WhatsApp and Facebook are identified as the main platforms on which the attacks occur, followed by X (Twitter), Instagram, email and Telegram, as shown in the bar chart. This prevalence of WhatsApp and Facebook is not because victims identify them as the most violent platforms, but rather because it is directly related to the respondents' greater use of these platforms.

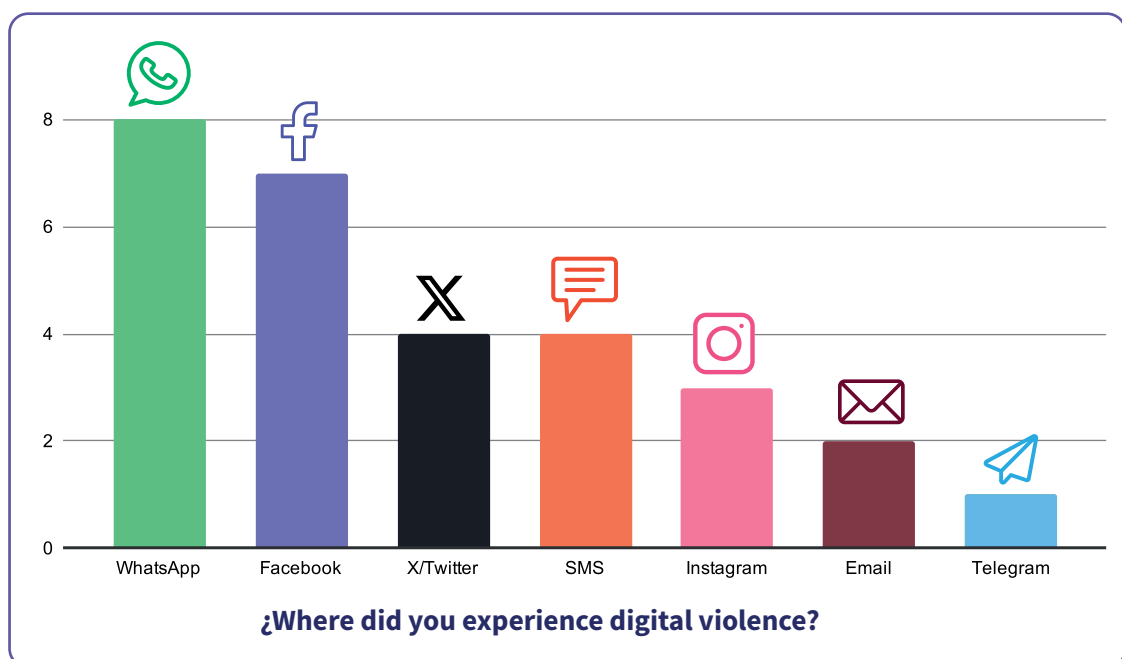


FIGURE 2. Platforms where TFGBV was experienced by respondents.

Source: Survey conducted by the authors.

4.3. Perpetrator profiles

Identifying who perpetrates this violence is essential to debunk the notion that TFGBV is the exclusive work of anonymous “trolls” or users disconnected from the victim’s reality. The analysis shows that the perpetrators have faces and names and are deeply embedded in the power structures surrounding union leaders.

The quantitative data reveal that most TFGBV occurs within the union environment itself. More than 50% of the victims surveyed identified coworkers as the main perpetrators, followed in second place by union leaders. State authorities and employers are reported less frequently; it is worth noting that all victims who identified state authorities are public employees, so it is likely that they are also referring to their employer. A third group consists of trolls, anti-rights groups and anonymous perpetrators, while partners or ex-partners, companies, identified private actors and the media were mentioned only marginally.

By cross-referencing this data with the testimonies, the perpetrators are categorized into three broad groups:

4.3.1. The internal union environment

Contrary to the common perception that the danger lies exclusively within the hierarchy of institutions or companies, the evidence shows that many of the most intimate and persistent attacks come from other workers and fellow activists. Because they have intimate knowledge of the women’s personal lives, these actors are able to inflict more precise harm. The analysis reveals that this “friendly fire” operates along two distinct political lines:

- ◆ **Internal dissent and competition for influence:** This stems from power struggles between union factions. A president of a union confederation clearly identifies this source: “Usually it’s our own union peers... we had identified that it was our peers from other union currents” (E4). The harassment can become a routine form of attrition intended to undermine the victim’s morale: “A colleague who was on a previous team in our union... posts something directed at me every day in her WhatsApp status” (E4).
- ◆ **“Yellow unions” or agents of the employer:** The interviews show that workers themselves often act as undercover agents for the employer. These are non-unionized employees, strikebreakers or members of co-opted unions (“yellow unions”) who operate as the employer’s enforcement arm to break the legitimate leadership without the institution getting its hands dirty. A General Secretary confirms this when recalling the spying on her organization’s WhatsApp groups: “I had coworkers who were co-opted by the employer” (E2). Likewise, in the case of the theft of intimate photos at a public company, the victim acknowledged that the operation was facilitated from within by “colleagues who, for personal reasons, let’s say, sold out to those in power at that time” (E5).

4.3.2. The employer

The authorities of institutions (state agencies, universities or companies) not only act as recipients of the internal surveillance described above but also serve as a protective shield for the perpetrators. When women report TFGBV in the workplace, the institutional hierarchy often ensures impunity.

In the private sector, a woman leader recounts how the institution covered up a case of digital sexual harassment by citing his ties to those in positions of power: “He was a dean’s favorite... they preferred to sweep everything under the rug” (E2). In the public sector, another woman leader points out that, despite identifying the government computer from which the defamation was orchestrated, the internal audit “was a complete farce; nothing ever came of it” (E5). This confirms that employers tolerate and shield TFGBV when it serves to weaken union representation.

4.3.3. External political-party actors

Finally, as evidenced by the use of automation and mass reporting, there is an external apparatus composed of digital operators and shock troops who answer to party structures. These actors are mobilized during specific events (such as legislative debates or elections) to punish women union members who take critical stances toward the governments in power, demonstrating that TFGBV also operates as a form of outsourced political repression in the digital sphere.

4.4. TFGBV: political in content; gender-based in form

Women union members are targeted by TFGBV primarily because of their role and their political stance within the union. More than 60% of those surveyed state that the violence they experience is a direct consequence of their work as activists, and although the remaining percentage say they do not know for certain, none of the victims deny this connection. This is evident in the main issues or areas of their activism in which women leaders report experiencing TFGBV: These are the defense of labor rights, the defense of democracy and power struggles within the union. Although to a lesser extent, denouncing sexist attitudes, feminist activism and political advocacy also emerge as triggers, as we can see in the following chart:

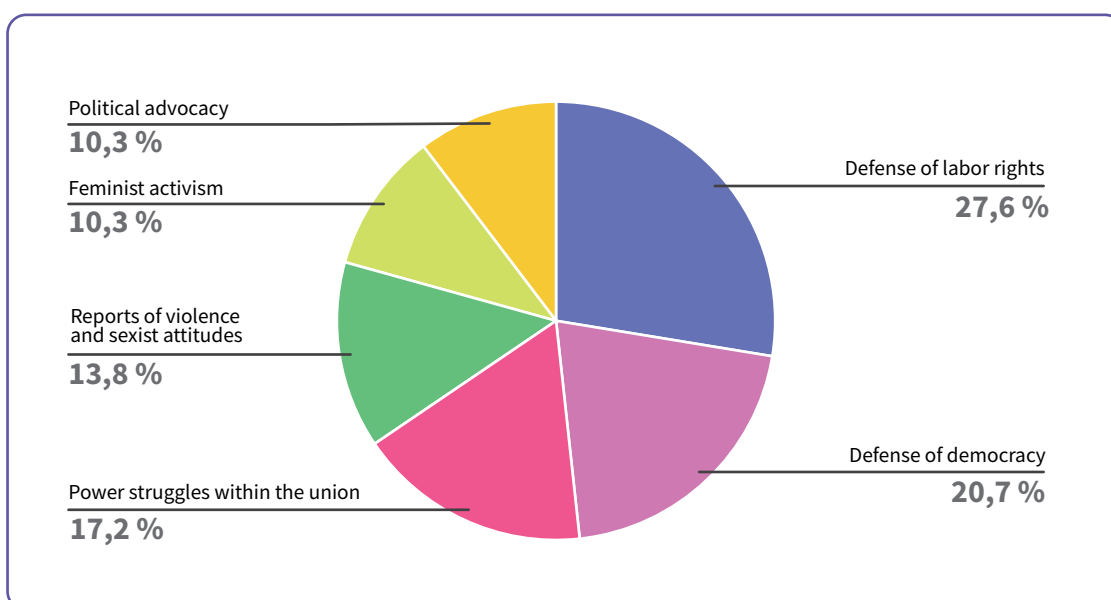


FIGURE 3. Chart based on the question: “In relation to which issues or areas of your activism do you experience TFGBV?” Source: Survey conducted by the authors.

There is an apparent tension between the motive or trigger for the aggression and the form it takes. The root of the aggression is clearly political and union-related, linked to union activity in opposition to the employer or internal dissent; however, the attack is carried out through the lens of gender: it relies on stigmatization and insults based on gender stereotypes, selectively targeting specific aspects of the union members’ identity that would rarely be used against their male opponents, such as physical appearance, private life and questioning of their leadership abilities.

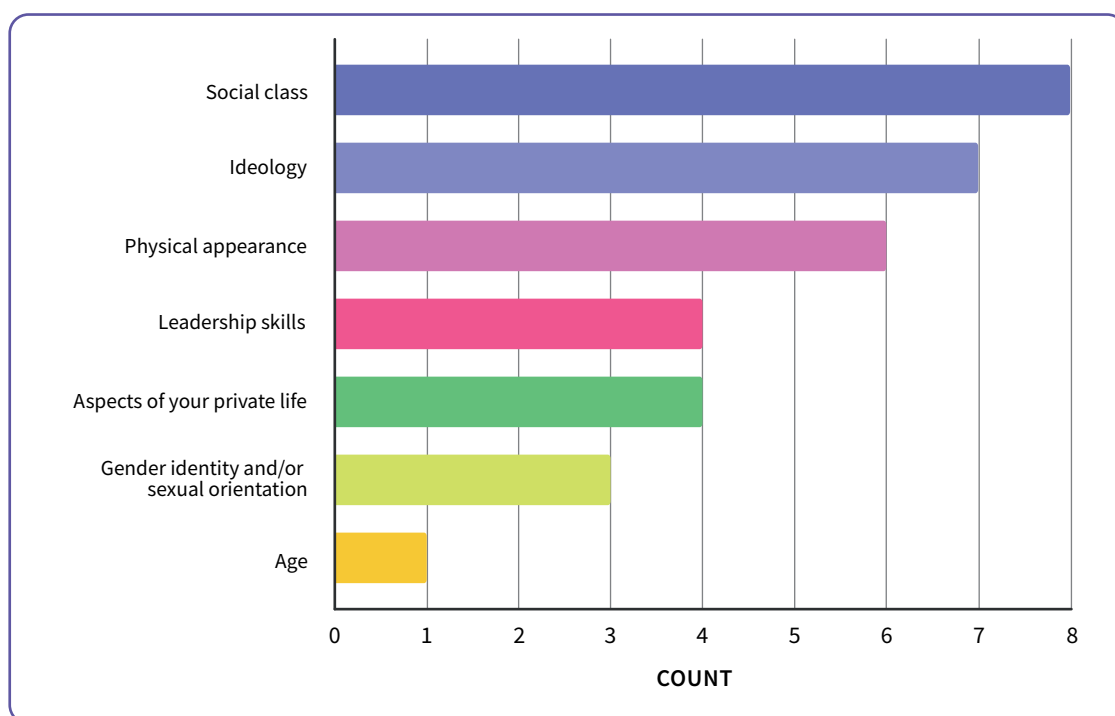


FIGURE 4. Figure 4. Chart based on the question: “What personal characteristics have been targeted?” Source: Survey conducted by the authors.

4.5. Impact and consequences of TFGBV

An analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data reveals that TFGBV has a significant impact. Ninety percent of victims report some type of direct consequence, and 40% of them indicate multiple effects. Furthermore, evidence shows that it has tangible and cumulative repercussions. The identified consequences operate at various levels (personal, occupational and political), creating a scenario designed to raise the cost of women’s public participation.

4.5.1. Psychological strain and invasion of privacy

The impact on emotional or psychological well-being (anxiety, fear, distress, stress, feelings of insecurity or isolation) is the most frequently reported effect among victims, followed immediately by damage to their reputation and sense of identity. Furthermore, TFGBV extends to physical health, manifesting as sleep disturbances (insomnia) and various psychosomatic symptoms.

This strain is deeply linked to the loss of privacy and misogynistic scrutiny. When the social and labor system punishes women by exposing their private lives or attacking their marital status, the mental burden becomes overwhelming, affecting not only the union member in her public role but also invading her family life and daily routine.

When we examine the forms of violence alongside their impacts, it becomes clear that defamation and damage to one’s reputation through false information—especially when combined with coordinated online attacks and the dissemination of non-consensual intimate material—are the forms with the greatest destructive power. E5 states in this regard: “Because I’ve been through it, I speak from personal experience. You can’t measure the pain. You have to go through it”.

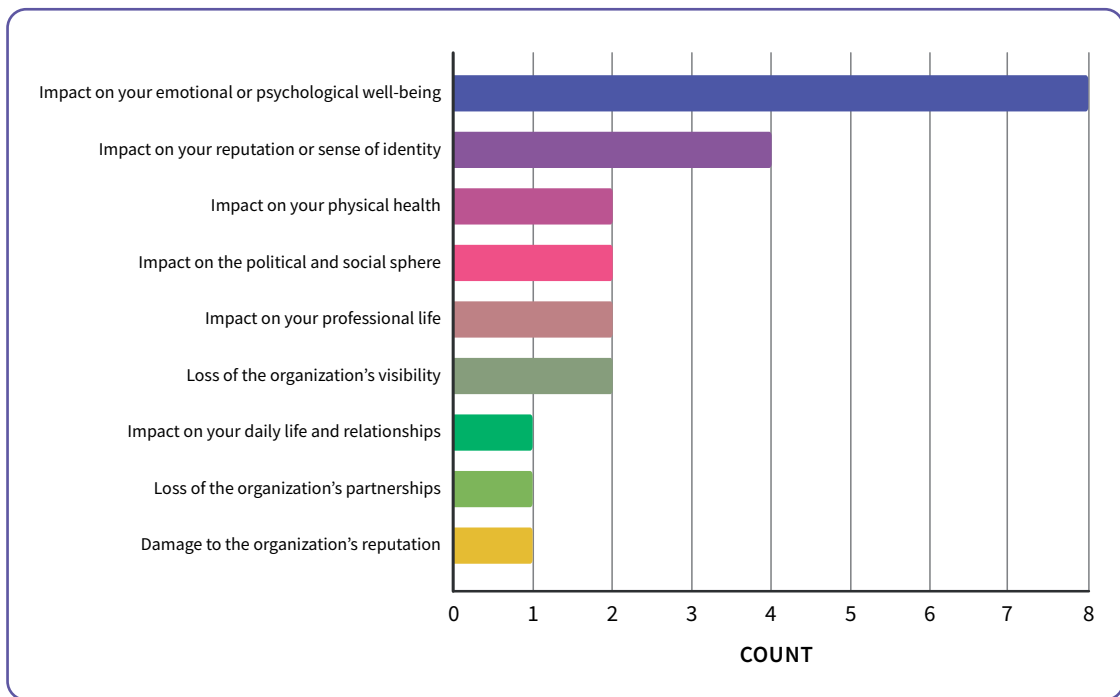


FIGURE 5. Figure 5. Chart based on the question: “What have been the consequences of TFGBV?”.

Source: Survey conducted by the authors.

4.5.2. Between resistance and defensive withdrawal

An analysis of the union leaders’ reactions to TFGBV reveals a tension between the need to maintain a political presence and the cost of personal attrition. Far from adopting a posture of passive victimization, the women leaders’ responses combine strategies of digital resistance with a defensive withdrawal.

Persistence and digital resistance: Nearly 50% of the victims reported that they continued to post normally on their social media accounts despite the attacks. However, this persistence does not mean they emerge unscathed; half of this group had to actively block the accounts of their attackers in order to maintain their participation in the public debate.

Withdrawal as a survival strategy: In contrast, defensive withdrawal takes place among 30% of the respondents. Women unionists are forced to adopt self-protection strategies that limit their own freedom of expression. This manifests itself through the temporary suspension of social media profiles (or the latent impulse to do so to curb the attacks). In cases of coordinated censorship (or mass reports), some women leaders directly abandon platforms like TikTok to migrate to spaces where they have greater control over their narrative. It is also expressed through the deliberate reduction of public exposure or digital presence. As a former general secretary who suffered employer persecution points out: “I, too, felt the need to not post as much” (E2). Likewise, no longer reading violent messages and notifications appears to be another coping mechanism in the face of overwhelming harassment. Many restrict their profiles or limit their use of social media to strictly family-related matters.

The certainty that grassroots conversations are captured via screenshots and sent to management has destroyed the spontaneity of the debate and the internal organizational trust. When asked whether current messaging groups are secure, a public-sector leader summed it up bluntly: “Honestly, no. It’s quite complicated” (E3). In that sense, WhatsApp is no longer a safe space.

4.5.3. The “hollowing out” of women in union leadership

The most serious impact of TFGBV extends beyond the direct victim and takes on a collective and structural dimension. More than 50% of the women surveyed who have not been direct victims report feeling the consequences of this context of violence, noting negative effects on their psychological well-being and on their own work environment.

This demonstrates that TFGBV has a strong deterrent effect. The fear of public exposure, moral scrutiny and the destruction of one’s personal reputation acts as an invisible yet highly effective barrier. As a result, current women leaders face serious difficulties in convincing new, qualified women colleagues to run for office or assume leadership positions.

The accounts gathered in the interviews starkly illustrate this paralysis. A public-sector leader describes the constant frustration of trying to form candidate slates or find the next generation of leaders: “It was extremely difficult for me to find women... There are very committed, excellent women, but they don’t want to participate; they’re afraid; they don’t want to expose themselves. They then tell you outright that more is demanded of us and that our personal lives are put on display” (E6). This systematic refusal confirms that the public shaming of high-profile women leaders functions as a pedagogy of terror for the rank and file. Women workers observe the extremely high emotional, occupational and family costs paid by their representatives and, in the absence of institutional safeguards, choose to withdraw.

By instilling fear in the rank and file, violence achieves discipline, silencing and the consequent “hollowing out” of women from positions of power and decision-making, thereby maintaining the male monopoly in the union movement.

4.6. Complaints and institutional responses to TFGBV

When analyzing access to justice and reporting channels, the consistent pattern is a low rate of formal complaints and dissatisfaction with the responses received, with the situation divided into three levels:

4.6.1. Online platforms’ failure to protect

Direct reporting to online platforms is the least common option and the one that yields the worst results. Of the 7 women who filed complaints or reports on a social media platform following an assault, 5 expressed complete dissatisfaction, claiming that the platform either failed to resolve the problem or ignored the report.

There is a divided and critical perception regarding the role of platforms in controversies related to feminism or human rights. While 9 women believe that these platforms create relatively safe and moderated spaces, another 9 maintain that they do not actively moderate content and instead contribute to an escalation of violence. The balance shifts toward the negative with the views of another 5 women leaders: one states that, although the platforms attempt to create safe environments, they fail to do so, while 4 directly assert that tech corporations encourage confrontation and violence because of their business models (engagement algorithms). Given this, more than 60% of the activists believe that companies should actively moderate TFGBV and 30% believe it should be explicitly banned.

4.6.2. The institutional silence of unions and the women's response

Of the 15 women in the sample who reported having been victims of TFGBV, only half (7) reported the situation to their own union. This underreporting can be attributed to the victims' own minimization of the violence as a defense mechanism in hostile environments, or to a lack of confidence in their organizations' ability to respond.

The nature of the union's response to the few women who did speak out (7) reveals a profound lack of institutional perspective: 6 out of 7 women say they received support from their organization; however, in only one case (1) did this support translate into formal institutional action through public statements; in the other cases, the support was limited exclusively to emotional support provided by other women colleagues in the union as an act of solidarity.

This demonstrates that, while the union as a formal institution tends to bureaucratize or ignore TFGBV, it is the informal networks of women that provide care and support to the victims.

4.6.3. Formal complaints and mistrust

58% of victims of TFGBV did not file any type of formal complaint. Among the minority who did decide to take action (42%), the responses were fragmented: 40% turned solely to their union or activist networks seeking collective protection; another 40% opted for a strategy of public visibility through complaints in the media or posts on social media; and only 20% turned to the National Police. These figures highlight the deep mistrust of state security agencies and the perception that the ordinary judicial system is ineffective in addressing gender-based cybercrimes.

4.6.4. Legal knowledge vs. actual application: The scope of law 5777/16 in Paraguay

The lack of use of legal channels is not due to the women leaders' ignorance of current regulations. On the contrary, the level of legal literacy in the sample is notably high: more than 85% of those surveyed stated that they are familiar with Law 5777/16 on "Comprehensive Protection of Women against All Forms of Violence".

Even when asked about specific technical aspects, the figure remains high: 80% recognize that Article 6 of that law defines and criminalizes digital violence. This gap between high awareness of the law (80%–85%) and the extremely low rate of police reporting (20% of those who reported) confirms that the problem does not lie in a lack of abstract legal tools, but rather in barriers to access to justice, revictimization at Paraguayan police stations and prosecutors' offices and the widespread perception of impunity regarding TFGBV.

The stark statistical gap between high awareness of the legal framework and limited judicial action can be directly explained in the qualitative experiences already documented throughout this report. As previously analyzed when describing the profile of perpetrators and employer complicity, women union members have empirical certainty that the system often acts as a protective shield for aggressors.

The cases documented in previous sections—ranging from IT audits at state agencies that are shelved without results to the institutional protection of harassers due to power affiliations in private universities—clearly illustrate how hierarchies prefer to silence the facts rather than defend women workers.

These ongoing patterns of injustice and corporate cover-ups have cemented an inescapable collective perception within the union movement: filing a complaint through police or judicial channels, even with the full protection and knowledge provided by Law 5777, means subjecting oneself to a bureaucratic maze and a guaranteed path of revictimization that rarely results in real and effective sanctions against those responsible.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Digital political violence as a mechanism of discipline

Women's participation in the union sphere, and specifically in leadership roles, continues to be marked by a structural asymmetry that does not align with their actual integration into the labor market. In this context, institutionalized machismo finds in TFGBV a contemporary vector of amplification that hinders the narrowing of historical gender gaps.

The findings of this research lead to the conclusion that TFGBV is no longer an isolated incident but has become a defining feature of the daily reality of women's union activism. This phenomenon is characterized by an alarming proximity: the main perpetrators of these attacks are not anonymous external actors, but rather the women's own coworkers and members of the union leadership.

This highlights a key conceptual tension: the motive for the violence is strictly political and union-related—rooted in internal power struggles or tensions with the employer—but the form of the aggression is distinctly gender-based. Digital attacks do not question the women leader's managerial capacity based on objective criteria; rather, they instrumentalize stereotypes and norms rooted in a sexist culture to attack her. Therefore, TFGBV operates within the union sphere as a tool for political discipline and punishment, designed to undermine the legitimacy of women who challenge historically male-dominated positions of power.

Likewise, qualitative analysis calls for broadening the focus to include the perpetrators: TFGBV in the labor union context is sustained not only by the misogyny of union peers but also by the structural complicity of the employer and the State. Institutions use this internally generated violence as a resource for corporate espionage, punishing dissent through concrete material reprisals. There is an undeniable continuum in which violence that originates online (through leaked screenshots or defamatory posts) quickly materializes in administrative investigations, confinement to unhealthy workspaces and the denial of economic benefits. In this way, the employer exploits machismo to weaken the union and undermine its leadership.

5.2. The performance of *Pire Hatā*: resilience, invulnerability and the paradox of withdrawal

In the face of hostility in the digital environment, women union leaders demonstrate a remarkable capacity for persistence and resilience. There is a deep appreciation for the space of power they have conquered and for the high political and personal cost they have had to pay to gain access to it. This journey endows women with a particular stoicism that allows them to continue their activism despite systematic attacks.

However, this resilience entails a profound paradox: On the one hand, the need to project absolute invulnerability responds to a mandate from the environment. In male-dominated spaces, a woman's display of fragility or emotional distress is instrumentalized by her male peers as an indicator of an inability to lead. To avoid losing political capital, female leaders downplay the impact of TFGBV on their own subjectivity.

On the other hand, this normalization of harm results in a low rate of formal and institutional complaints. By treating violence as an "occupational hazard", the severity of the aggression is rendered invisible.

Although this resilience prevents women from leaving the political arena altogether, the study demonstrates that TFGBV does qualitatively alter women's activism through strategic self-censorship and a withdrawal in the virtual sphere. Forced to meticulously gauge and monitor their posts and public stances to avoid waves of attacks, an indirect silencing occurs that minimizes their vis-

ibility and slows the incorporation of new women into broader activism, as they view digital exposure as a discouraging risk factor.

This withdrawal not only affects the public visibility of women leaders but has also destroyed spaces for collective organizing. Instant messaging platforms (such as WhatsApp), initially conceived as safe, horizontal spaces for grassroots coordination, have lost their status as safe spaces in the face of the constant threat of infiltration. The certainty of being monitored from within forces women to stifle the spontaneity of union debate, fragmenting collective trust and isolating women leaders in their decision-making.

5.3. The private sphere as a breaking point and ideological heterogeneity

Despite the political armor built by the women leaders, the research identifies an unequivocal limit to the tolerance of TFGBV: the crossing of the boundary into private life and the family environment. When digital attacks violate personal space, damage personal reputation or threaten the safety of the family unit, a breaking point is reached. This shift from the public-union sphere to the private-emotional sphere represents the most damaging force of technology and constitutes the primary deterrent for future generations of activists.

Likewise, the participants' narratives reveal a contradiction: women's assumption of non-traditional political roles does not automatically translate into the adoption of a feminist identity or consciousness. Although the exercise of political power by these women leaders constitutes in itself a de facto departure from gender norms, many of them operate without a full awareness of the dynamics of oppression and the stereotypes that constrain them. This hinders the development of collective gender agendas within the unions themselves and fragments solidarity-based responses to violence.

Faced with this landscape of institutional abandonment and a lack of gender solidarity in mixed-gender spaces, the study identifies the emergence of radical self-protection strategies. Unable to reconcile their activism with intra-union violence, some rank-and-file members have opted for "strategic separatism", promoting the creation of exclusively women's organizations and executive committees. This tactic, rather than originating as an ideological stance, arises as a survival instinct to shield their political representation from patriarchal co-optation and the psychological strain imposed by their own male colleagues.

5.4. Legal shortcomings and the need for a multisectoral response

Finally, the study concludes that the current regulatory framework, specifically Law No. 5777/16 on Comprehensive Protection for Women in Paraguay, is manifestly insufficient to curb and punish TFGBV. Although the law nominally recognizes telematic and digital violence, there is an insurmountable gap between abstract knowledge of the law and its effective application. Women leaders perceive that state agencies lack the technical tools, gender sensitivity and punitive mechanisms necessary to resolve the problem, which perpetuates impunity on digital platforms.

Consequently, the response to TFGBV cannot rely exclusively on individual legal complaints but requires a multisectoral and coordinated approach on three fronts:

The State: Through the operational strengthening of Law No. 5777/16, ensuring secure reporting channels and gender-sensitive forensic analysis of digital evidence. It is imperative that the Public Prosecutor's Office act ex officio in response to public digital attacks, and that the complete independence of victim support programs be guaranteed from institutional Human Resources departments, which currently act to cover up for employers.

Corporate digital platforms: Through active and context-specific moderation policies that halt the escalation of violence and coordinated harassment against activists, moving beyond the current ineffectiveness of simply blocking accounts.

Organized union movement: Urgently recognizing TFGBV as a political, structural and institutional problem, rather than as a private issue to be resolved through emotional and informal support among women colleagues. Unions must implement “zero-tolerance” clauses in their bylaws, internal disciplinary protocols and firm institutional support to eradicate sexist forms of discipline from their own ranks. They must also implement digital safety literacy programs, taking institutional responsibility for protecting women to stem their exodus from union life.

Comprehensive support and redress: Beyond punitive measures, organizations must overcome their passivity and establish formal networks of psychological, legal and technical support for victims. It is imperative to create internal observatories to document these attacks in order to rescue collective memory and demonstrate that they are not “personal problems”, but rather systematic attacks on the human rights of women workers.

5.5. Recognition as an occupational hazard

The Ministry of Labor and public institutions must classify TFGBV perpetrated by supervisors or coworkers as an explicit form of workplace violence and harassment (in accordance with ILO Convention No. 190), requiring employers to bear the costs of redress and to ensure work environments (both physical and digital) free from violence.

DECLARATION ON THE USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE TOOLS

In compliance with academic transparency standards, we disclose the use of artificial intelligence tools (Gemini) exclusively for: style review and editing; systematization and organization of bibliographic information; and support in identifying relevant sources during the literature review. All analytical content, normative interpretation and argumentative development remain the product of the authors' direct intellectual work.

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7. APPENDIX

Survey Instrument

TFGBV against Unions

This survey is part of the research project “Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV) Against Union Members in Paraguay”, conducted by TEDIC.

The objective of the research is to conduct an exploratory study to identify how and to what extent technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) affects union participation in Paraguay, and to advance toward a greater understanding of the issue.

You received this survey because the research team has identified you as someone who may be interested in participating. The personal data provided by survey participants is anonymous both during collection and when the information is analyzed and published. No published information can be linked to your personal data.

This survey is designed to take no more than 10 minutes to complete. Thank you!

Data policy

By participating in this research, you have the following rights:

- ◆ To request information about how your personal data is processed and to request a copy of that data.
- ◆ To request that any inaccuracies in your personal data be corrected without delay.
- ◆ To request that incomplete personal data be completed, even through a supplementary statement.
- ◆ To withdraw from the research at any time. Your data will be deleted immediately.

If you wish to contact us, you can do so by emailing belencanterofer@gmail.com

Welcome!

Do you accept the terms of the consent for data processing as stated above? *

Please select only one of the following options:

☐ Yes

☐ No

PERSONAL DATA

Gender

Select one of the following options

Please select **only one** of the following options:

- ☐ Woman
- ☐ Travesti/Transgender
- ☐ Non-binary
- ☐ I'd rather not say
- ☐ Other

Sexual Orientation

Select one of the following options

Please select **only one** of the following options:

- ☐ Heterosexual
- ☐ Lesbian
- ☐ Bisexual
- ☐ I'd rather not say
- ☐ Other

Age Range

Select one of the following options

Please select **only one** of the following options:

- ☐ 18–30
- ☐ 31–40
- ☐ 41–50
- ☐ 51–60
- ☐ 61–70
- ☐ Over 70

What role do you hold in your organization?

Select one of the following options

Please select **only one** of the following options:

- ☐ General Secretary/President
- ☐ Member of the Executive Committee
- ☐ Member of a Secretariat
- ☐ Grassroots activist/Member
- ☐ Other

What tasks do you perform in your organization?

Select all that apply

Please check the options that apply:

- ☐ Representation and/or spokesperson duties
- ☐ Participating in the discussion and planning of union actions
- ☐ Organizing actions and/or events
- ☐ Executive secretariat duties
- ☐ Communications management
- ☐ Participating in union activities
- ☐ Other:

Does your role include tasks in digital or online environments or a digital presence?

Select one of the following options

Please select **only one** of the following options:

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Partially

UNION DATA

What sector is your union or association part of?

Select one of the following options

Please select **only one** of the following options:

- ☐ Public
- ☐ Private

Which option best represents the reality of women's participation in your organization?

Select one of the following options

Please select **only one** of the following options:

- ☐ Full participation: Equal representation in leadership and operational roles.
- ☐ Participation in middle management: Presence in coordination and supervisory positions, but not in top management.
- ☐ Operational participation: Women make up the majority within the base of the organizational pyramid.
- ☐ Symbolic participation: Women are present only in very specific or low-responsibility roles.

TECHNOLOGY-FACILITATED GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

We define technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) as “any act that is committed, assisted, aggravated, or amplified by the use of information communication technologies or other digital tools, that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual, psychological, social, political, or economic harm, or other infringements of rights and freedoms”. (UN, 2023).

Have you been a victim of technology-facilitated gender-based violence?

Please select only one of the following options:

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

ABOUT TFGBV

Please answer this section only if the following conditions are met:

You answered “Yes” to question “[Q002]” (Have you been a victim of technology-facilitated gender-based violence?)

Do you think the TFGBV you experience is due to your work as an activist?

Select one of the following options

Please select **only one** of the following options:

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I don't know

What personal characteristics have been targeted?

Select all that apply

Please check the options that apply:

- ☐ Physical appearance
- ☐ Gender identity and/or sexual orientation
- ☐ Age
- ☐ Race/Ethnicity
- ☐ Ideology
- ☐ Social class
- ☐ Leadership ability
- ☐ Feminist activism
- ☐ Aspects of your private life
- ☐ Other:

How often do you receive/have you received TFGBV?

Select one of the following options

Please select **only one** of the following options:

- ☐ Daily
- ☐ Weekly
- ☐ Monthly
- ☐ Occasionally
- ☐ At specific times (during specific circumstances, campaigns or publications)
- ☐ I don't know

What forms of TFGBV did you experience?

Select all that apply

Please check the options that apply:

- ☐ Digital harassment/attacks from a single profile
- ☐ Online harassment (coordinated and organized attacks against specific people or issues)
- ☐ Stigmatization (“Women don’t know how to lead”; “Women shouldn’t talk about politics”; “Lesbians are a social aberration”)
- ☐ Aggression and insults (“You’re incompetent”; “Go back to the kitchen”; “Feminazi”)
- ☐ Threats (“I’m going to kill you”; “We’re going to rape you as you leave work”; “You deserve to be raped”)
- ☐ Non-consensual dissemination of intimate material (the publication without consent of photos, audio recordings, videos or texts related to a person’s private life)
- ☐ Creation of synthetic images or videos to make it appear as though victims are engaging in sexual, violent or compromising activities that never occurred
- ☐ Defamation and damage to reputation through false and offensive online information or comments
- ☐ Doxxing (the publication or leak of private information—such as addresses, phone numbers, email addresses, family details, daily routines or private photos—with the intent to harass, humiliate and damage a person’s reputation)
- ☐ Identity theft (the use of someone’s identity without their consent, or the creation and dissemination of false personal information, with the intent to damage the reputation of a person or organization)
- ☐ Extortion (forcing a person to act according to another person’s will through threats and intimidation)
- ☐ Workplace violence (systematic and prolonged psychological harassment by employers or coworkers, intended to harm, isolate or force the worker to resign)

- ☐ Digital surveillance (the constant monitoring of a person's online activities, daily life, or information, whether public or private)
- ☐ Unauthorized access or hacking of accounts (unauthorized attacks to gain access to other people's accounts or devices)
- ☐ Use of spyware (software designed to spy on and obtain information from other devices)
- ☐ Call interception and tapping (unauthorized access to call data and its capture for the purpose of wiretapping)
- ☐ I don't know
- ☐ Other:

When do these acts of TFGBV occur?

Select all that apply

Please check the options that apply:

- ☐ Only when I post
- ☐ I receive attacks regardless of whether I post or not, with no clear pattern
- ☐ I am or have been the target of attacks to the point that campaigns have been or are being waged against me on social media and messaging apps
- ☐ I receive attacks at specific times or in connection with specific events
- ☐ Other:

In relation to which issues or areas of your activism do you experience TFGBV?

Select all that apply

Please check the options that apply:

- ☐ Feminist activism
- ☐ Power struggles within the union
- ☐ Gender discrimination
- ☐ Reports of violence and sexist attitudes
- ☐ Political advocacy
- ☐ Public statements on social media
- ☐ Defense of labor rights
- ☐ Defense of democracy
- ☐ Other:

Where does the TFGBV you experience originate?

Select all that apply

Please check the options that apply:

- ☐ It originated in the digital sphere and was limited to that environment
- ☐ It originated offline but continued or was amplified online
- ☐ It originated in person and continued offline, with no connection to digital media
- ☐ It originated in digital environments and continued or had impacts offline
- ☐ It originated simultaneously in digital and offline spaces
- ☐ It is not possible to identify a clear origin
- ☐ I don't know / I don't remember

Where did you experience digital violence?

Select all that apply

Please check the options that apply:

- ☐ SMS
- ☐ Email
- ☐ X/Twitter
- ☐ Facebook
- ☐ Instagram
- ☐ WhatsApp
- ☐ Signal
- ☐ Telegram
- ☐ Tiktok
- ☐ Youtube
- ☐ Threads
- ☐ The organization's website
- ☐ Bolt/Uber messaging
- ☐ Other:

When you received TFGBV, your reaction was:

Select all that apply

Please check the options that apply:

- ☐ An impulse (not acted upon) to close or suspend my profiles to avoid further attacks
- ☐ An impulse (not acted upon) to report the incident
- ☐ I temporarily suspended my profiles
- ☐ I permanently closed a profile
- ☐ I reported the attack on the relevant platform
- ☐ I blocked the harassing accounts
- ☐ I stopped reading violent messages or notifications
- ☐ I considered reducing my public exposure or digital participation
- ☐ I continued posting as usual
- ☐ Other:

Have you ever had your social media profile censored, blocked or deleted by the platforms?

Select one of the following options

Please select **only one** of the following options:

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I don't know

Has the level of violence you experience changed compared to 2 or 3 years ago?

Please check the options that apply:

- ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
 - ☐ I don't know
-

PERPETRATOR PROFILES

What is the profile of the person(s) who attacked you?

Select all that apply

Please check the options that apply:

- ☐ I could not identify them
- ☐ Government authorities
- ☐ Public employees
- ☐ Members of the armed forces
- ☐ Members of the Military and Civil Police
- ☐ Companies
- ☐ Protesters
- ☐ Identified private actors
- ☐ Businesspeople
- ☐ Media outlets
- ☐ Union leaders
- ☐ Religious leaders
- ☐ Organized social groups or social movements
- ☐ Anti-rights or conservative groups
- ☐ Organized crime groups, drug cartels, guerrilla groups, paramilitaries and militias
- ☐ Trolls or troll centers
- ☐ Unidentified individuals (anonymous)
- ☐ Intermediary platforms (social media, search engines and internet service providers)
- ☐ Employers
- ☐ Coworkers
- ☐ Partner / ex-partner
- ☐ Other

PREVENTION, JUSTICE AND SECURITY

To whom or through what channel was the complaint filed?

Select all that apply

Please check the options that apply:

- ☐ I did not file a complaint
- ☐ Complaint filed with the justice system (prosecutor's office, courts or other judicial bodies)
- ☐ Complaint filed with the police
- ☐ Complaint posted on social media to raise awareness
- ☐ Complaint filed with the media to raise awareness
- ☐ Reported to unions, professional associations or activist networks
- ☐ Other:

Have you informed your union or association about the TFGBV that you are experiencing or have experienced?

Please select only one of the following options:

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Have you received support from the organization?

Please select only one of the following options:

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

What did this support consist of?

Please write your answer here:

If you reported the attacks on any social media platform, the platform's response:

Select all that apply

Please check the options that apply:

- ☐ I was satisfied; I believe they resolved the issue raised in the report
- ☐ I was not satisfied; they did not resolve the issue raised in the report
- ☐ They did not respond
- ☐ Not applicable

In public debates or controversies related to feminism or human rights, do you believe that digital platforms:

Select one of the following options

Please select only one of the following options:

- ☐ Create relatively safe and moderated spaces
- ☐ Allow violence to escalate and do not actively moderate
- ☐ Encourage confrontation and violence
- ☐ Other

What do you think the policy of digital platforms should be regarding TFGBV against activists?

Select one of the following options

Please select **only one** of the following options:

- ☐ Prohibit
- ☐ Moderate
- ☐ Do not intervene
- ☐ I don't know

Are you familiar with or have you heard of Law 5777/16 on Comprehensive Protection of Women against All Forms of Violence?

Select one of the following options

Please select **only one** of the following options:

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I don't know

Did you know that this law includes provisions regarding digital violence? The law refers to it as "telematic violence". Article 6, Section L of Law 5777

Select one of the following options

Please select **only one** of the following options:

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I don't know

If you filed a complaint with the justice system regarding TFGBV, what was your perception of the judicial outcome?

Select one of the following options

Please select **only one** of the following options:

- ☐ Satisfactory
- ☐ Adequate
- ☐ Inadequate
- ☐ None
- ☐ Not applicable

Would you recommend that activists report TFGBV to the judicial system?

Select one of the following options

Please select **only one** of the following options:

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I don't know

What have been the consequences of TFGBV?

Select all that apply

Please check the options that apply:

- ☐ Impact on your emotional or psychological well-being (anxiety, fear, distress, stress, feelings of insecurity or isolation)
- ☐ Impact on your reputation or sense of identity
- ☐ Impact on your physical health (sleep disturbances, psychosomatic symptoms)
- ☐ Impact on the political and social sphere (opportunities, visibility or support)
- ☐ Impact on your professional life (professional performance, difficulties finding other jobs, promotions or other opportunities)
- ☐ Impact on your daily life and relationships (changes in your daily routine due to fear of exposing yourself online or in public spaces, distancing yourself from friends, family or colleagues)
- ☐ Loss of the organization's partnerships
- ☐ Loss of the organization's visibility
- ☐ Damage to the organization's reputation
- ☐ Other:

Based on your experience and that of your organization, what measures should the State, digital platforms and organizations adopt to prevent, address and provide redress for TFGBV?

Please write your answer here:

SECTION FOR THOSE WHO HAVE NOT BEEN VICTIMS OF TFGBV

Do you know anyone who has been a victim of TFGBV? *

Please select only one of the following options:

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Do you think that in recent years, TFGBV...?

Select one of the following options

Please select only one of the following options:

- ☐ Has increased
- ☐ Has remained the same
- ☐ Has decreased

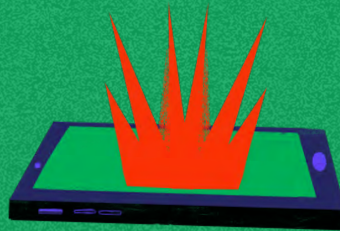
Has this situation affected you in any way?

- ☐ It has not affected me personally
- ☐ Impact on my emotional or psychological well-being (anxiety, fear, distress, stress, feelings of insecurity or isolation)
- ☐ Impact on my reputation or sense of identity
- ☐ Impact on my physical health (sleep disturbances, psychosomatic symptoms)
- ☐ Impact on the political and social sphere (opportunities, visibility or support)
- ☐ Impact on my professional life (professional performance, difficulties finding other jobs, promotions or other opportunities)
- ☐ Impact on my daily life and relationships (changes in daily routine due to fear of exposing yourself online or in public spaces, distancing from friends, family or colleagues)
- ☐ Other (please specify):

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. Your response is very important. All your answers will be treated with the strictest confidentiality and used solely for aggregate analysis purposes. Once the study is complete, we will share the results.

Submit your form.

Thank you for completing this survey.



La VIOLENCIA DIGITAL ES REAL

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