



Gender based political violence against women in Mexico from a regional perspective

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Abstract

Gender Based Political Violence Against Women (GBPVAV) is one main form of political discrimination. It violently affects women, obstructs social justice (economic redistribution, sociocultural recognition and political representation) for all and hinders parity democracy. In April 2020, the federal law of GBPVAV was approved in Mexico. From September 7th, 2020 until June 6th, 2021, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, the biggest and most complex electoral process in Mexico took place, including 95 million registered voters with 21,368 elected positions in dispute and elections in almost half of the states that make up the republic. For the first time in history, gender parity was established by a strict quota system at municipal, state and federal levels. This exacerbated all forms of political violence, political violence against women and gender-based political violence against women. GBPVAV is one of the least researched emerging topics in the social sciences and is mostly absent in regional science debates. This article presents the results of an in-depth study, encompassing a research team of 26 academics, primarily developed and led by the presenting author. Results of a triangulated multidisciplinary research model with a transversal social justice and regional lens includes historical and juridical harmonization indicators, the creation of two quantitative regional indexes, qualitative indicators resulting from over 150 in-depth interviews of experts and female politicians, socio-digital media and a resilience study. Regarding the Mexican case study, the Reform Decree of April 13th, 2020 typifying GBPVAV is celebrated, providing the country with the second most advanced legislation worldwide. However, this research documented that there are still multiple areas of opportunity linked to affirmative action, substantive equality and transversal parity.

Keywords Gender based political violence against women · Mexico · Federal elections · Gender · Multidiscipline

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1 Theoretic-conceptual discussion

Gender equality promotes more egalitarian societies, this benefits everybody in social, economic and political terms. It impacts positively on poverty, development, environmental sustainability, education, labor, care systems, peace and societal security (as can be seen in the transversal gender lens of the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Goals). It is also essential to transform all forms of violence, especially gendered violence. A fundamental step towards gender equality is women's participation in politics. As equal citizens, women ought to have equivalent responsibilities, rights and opportunities. Over the last century, societies and nations across the globe have transformed in favor of gender equality, all countries except for the Vatican have reformed in favor of equal political rights. Quota systems have been established, and legal reforms have guaranteed that women have formal access to politics as activists, voters, candidates, party members, public servants and leaders. Women are still underrepresented at all levels of decision-making, but there have been significant advances. In 2022 women constitute 26% of national parliamentarians worldwide, compared to 11% in 1995 (UN Women 2022). Given patriarchal culture and sex-gender systems traditionally relegating women to the private-domestic realm, female empowerment has been met with resistance, backlash and violence. Gender Based Violence against Women is the form of violence that affects women participating in politics given that they are women, with a gender component.

In order to comprehensively research Gender Based Political Violence against Women (GBPVAW) in the Mexican context, given the legal reforms in April 2020 that put forward a clear legal concept of GBPVAW, outlining conducts and sanctions, a multidisciplinary research model was designed and implemented during the 2020–2021 Federal Electoral Process (20–21 FEP), the first ensuing the reform. Given the significant gender and social inequalities in Mexico, it was designed taking gender justice and social justice as pillar. Gender justice defined as “the achievement of equality between women and men in conjunction with measures to redress the disadvantages that lead to the subordination of women and to enable them to access and control resources together with human agency” (Benavente and Valdés 2014, p. 16). Social justice has to do with a positive freedom conception, with guaranteeing rights and human security (Truong et al. 2014), it relates to societies' ability to promote the conditions for wellbeing, enabling persons and collectivities to exercise their abilities, express their experiences and determine the course of actions (agency). According to Iris Marion Young (2000, 2003) it includes not only the distribution, but also the institutional conditions necessary for the development of personal capacities, communication and collective cooperation. Nancy Fraser (1997, 1998, 2000, 2005, 2015) develops a tripartite conception of social justice for the era of complex, globalized and contemporary societies, of post-social politics, encompassing the economic dimension of redistribution, the sociocultural dimension of recognition together with the political dimension of representation, all three bearing equal weight. A social justice perspective is indispensable, since political violence goes hand in

hand with social and economic exclusion in a plurinational state such as Mexico, and women occupy diverse social positions intersectionally (Bonfil 2017). This means that gender inequality and violence is concomitant to other structural inequalities, power relations and social differentiation systems, and there is great benefit on analyzing them specifically and in conjunction (Crenshaw 2005; Yuval-Davis 2006; Zúñiga 2014). For example, only 1% of women legislators at federal level are indigenous, despite 21.5% of the Mexican population identifying as indigenous (Bonfil 2017), Afro-Mexican women are not even represented.

Conceptually, GBPVAW is different to political violence, and it is relevant, since it is a type of violence that seeks to limit women's political participation because they are women (Krook 2020; Krook and Restrepo 2016a, 2016b). Conceptualizing GBPVAW in Mexico took years of discussion and more than forty legal reform initiatives since 2012. In April 2020, it was officially defined as “any action or omission, including tolerance, based on gender elements and exercised within the public or private sphere, which has the purpose or result of limiting, annulling or undermining the effective exercise of electoral political rights” of women (DOF 2020).

Mexico committed to women's political participation through multiple means, such as international agreements, quota systems, legal reforms, although cultural beliefs, institutional obstacles and structural determinants persist (Friedenberg 2017), hindering women's representation and reproducing the sex-gender system. This translates into dogmatic opinions stating women are less capable to become apt candidates, to win elections and to rule; into institutional practices that segregate women at the bottom of party hierarchies, leave them out of decision-making political organs, and make them candidates in non-competitive districts. Also, gender care systems and structural constraints limit women's participation in politics, with a gender wage gap between 30% (Cuellar and Moreno 2022) and a total workload of 19.7 h extra per week for women, especially given domestic work (Pedrero 2018). Women in Mexico achieved suffrage in 1953, voting for the first time in 1955. Since, women's participation in the public realm has steadily increased. For example, the country went from having 14% of female federal representatives in 1995 to having 49% in 2018, a three-fold increase in 23 years. During the 20–21 FEP, women made up 51% of candidates at all levels of government, which was unprecedented and ranks Mexico sixth in terms of female federal representation (IPU 2020), however ownership and control of political parties was mainly in the hands of men (82.27%). The country is made up of 32 federal states, and in its entire history it has only had 15 female governors, 6 got elected during the 20–21 FEP given parity quotas. Female representation at municipal government was 28% prior to the 20–21 FEP, and 27% as a result of elections, despite candidate quotas.

There have been significant advances in the realm of political representation, although challenges persist and go hand in hand with the economic arena of redistribution and the sociocultural dimension of recognition, where violence towards women for gender reasons is ever present. Thus, the research model developed in order to assess GBPVAW is multidisciplinary, triangulated, and aware of regional and intersectional disparities.

2 Research model

The Research model, based on the gender and social justice conception, accounting for regional divergences, consisted of seven main interlinked areas. A brief outline of each:

1. A historical and juridical contextual framework to GBPVAV, accounting for the evolution of political and electoral rights and assessing the April 2020 GBPVAV reform in the light of the international, regional and national frameworks;
2. Juridical analysis: indicators to measure harmonization of legislation at state and federal level, in the light of international treaties regarding GBPVAV;
3. Contextual and social justice framework: the core theoretical concepts to analyze GBPVAV, linking social justice to intersectionality and interculturality, enabling a deeper comprehension of the specific regional social and cultural contexts where this violence takes place;
4. Quantitative analysis: studying the relationship between socioeconomic conditions and regional levels of violence through a geographical analysis of crime and violence indicators, generating GBPVAV risk maps, complemented by a questionnaire that was answered by 60 women participating in politics, as a basis for the design of two GBPVAV indicators: the GBPVAV Trend Index and the Potential GBPVAV Index.
5. Qualitative analysis: first-hand research data collected during the 20–21 FEP from 150 in-depth interviews (75 to women contending in politics at all levels across the country and 75 to GBPVAV experts: academics, public servants, journalists, activists and academics), and monitoring of specialized GBPVAV regional fora.
6. A study of news media and twitter: following an in-depth study of mass media reporting and twitter threads, identifying five main GBPVAV trends in the 20–21 FEP;
7. A study of women's resilience in the face of GBPVAV: a model of resilience is developed following 26 in-depth interviews with women in politics focusing on alternatives to GBPVAV.

3 Research findings

Regarding **the historical and juridical contextual framework to GBPVAV**, Mexico has progressively signed and ratified various international human rights treaties, and is also the second country with the greatest progress in terms of GBPVAV regulations. It is the sociopolitical context of the country, international pressure, and above all the alliances of women in Congress, which has most promoted the creation of instruments for the protection of women's rights. Milestones were the creation on the National Institute for Women (INMUJERES) in 2001, the General Law for Equality between Women and Men in 2006, the General Law on Women's Access to a Life Free of Violence in 2007, as well as the constitutional shift from gender

quotas to gender parity in 2014 and overall parity in 2019 (INMUJERES, 2019). Regionally, by 2018, 29 out of 32 federal states had some legislation regarding GBPAW, after April 2020, 6 states set up GBPAW attention protocols (Aguascalientes, Campeche, Nuevo León, Quintana Roo, Sonora and Zacatecas), 6 states elaborated action guidelines (Durango, Guanajuato, Nayarit, Oaxaca, Tlaxcala and Yucatán), 1 state designed a GBPAW Manual (Mexico City), and 1 state an ABC Guide to GBPAW (Hidalgo). The states that have no protocols but follow federal lineaments are Baja California, Colima, Coahuila, Chiapas, Querétaro, San Luis Potosí, Chihuahua, Tlaxcala and Veracruz.

Following the **juridical analysis** a set of fourteen indicators were developed to measure the harmonization of legislation at state and federal level, in the light of international treaties regarding GBPAW that can be measured both at federal level and in each federal entity, including the State obligations to respect, protect, promote and guarantee human rights. Others had to do with the creation and maintenance of a social structure to guarantee institutional elements, such as availability, accessibility, quality and acceptability; with duties and redress mechanisms once rights have been violated, such as truth, justice and reparation. Lastly, indicators consider the principles of application of rights: legislation core, progressiveness, non-regression, and maximization of available resources. All of these, to prevent, address, sanction, and eradicate GBPAW.

The contextual and social justice framework highlights the importance of analyzing GBPAW linking social justice to intersectionality and interculturality (Chappel 2016; Hancock 2007; Anthias 2013; Winker and Degele 2011), in order to enable a deeper comprehension of the social and cultural contexts where this violence takes place, reproducing the sex-gender system, making group and regional disparities central, as has been analyzed in pioneering gender and political violence literature in Mexico (Barrera and Cárdenas 2016; Massolo 1994; Moreno & Ramos 2003; Dalton 2010; Bonfil 2017, 2020; Burguete 2020). Following Fraser's conception of participatory parity, it integrates demands for social equality and cultural recognition, with the importance of political representation and subaltern counter-publics and counter-discourses, in order to overcome structural and symbolic determinants, androcentric values and practices in society and institutions (Fraser 1998, 2001, 2015), challenging the naturalization, justification, invisibilization and normalization of GBPAW. Gender and social justice, following Fraser and Young (1994), requires making societal arrangements in order to allow all members of society and collectivities to interact, contest and participate in political life on equal terms in all spheres of life. Social injustice, inequality and gender violence in the Latin American context, as well as exclusion from government structures and processes, cannot be comprehensively addressed if the historical processes of colonization and under-representation of minority groups in general, and women in particular, are not accounted for. Participatory parity needs gender and intercultural parity at the base. The mechanisms put in place by electoral party systems and institutional democracy are not enough (Albaine 2020; CEPAL 2007). If democratic institutions make specific inclusion efforts, not tolerating injustice and social oppression, or any form of gender violence and GBPAW, it would significantly decrease in society, its institutions and in peoples' everyday life.

Quantitative analysis was undertaken in two steps. First, studying the relationship between socioeconomic conditions of social and gender injustice and regional levels of violence through a geographical analysis of crime and violence indicators, of the regional behavior of the National Register of Sanctioned People, generating GBPVAW risk maps, Secondly, given potential primary data gaps, two complementary GBPVAW-specific indicators were designed. The GBPVAW Trend Index looks at existing GBPVAW sanctions, and in order to overcome the long periods of time that legal suits take, the Potential GBPVAW Index looks at the regional behavior of all official claims of GBPVAW, whether they have a formal sanction or not. Given that women who participate in politics are not always willing or able to file GBPVAW claims, the data was complemented by a questionnaire and by the qualitative study discussed below.

Following a classification of some core indicators of social injustice, the federal states to the south with the highest numbers of women victims of GBPVAW are also entities with significant socioeconomic challenges, for example, Veracruz, Oaxaca, Tabasco and Chiapas. Following the GBPVAW reform, the National Register of Sanctioned People (RNPS) was created in September 2020, and it is an open access database containing people sanctioned for GBPVAW.¹ Until July 1st, 2022, there were 249 registers, accounting for 223 people (given repeat offenders), 187 men (83.9%) and 36 women (16.1%) from 26 federal states. This does not mean that the other federal states do not experience GBPVAW, only that there were no formal complaints or denouncements, or that those registered were not ruled to be GBPVAW (see Fig. 1). In the future, when the RNPS grows in size (# of cases), it would be useful to calculate the ratio of sanctions relative to the size of the population in each federal state (see Reyes and Guerra 2021), as well as the share of municipalities in each federal state and thus the number of electoral positions disputed,² to account for the severity of the acts of GBPVAW, as well undertaking longitudinal studies.

The research team designed two indexes that enable us to see the behavior of GBPVAW during an electoral process and across time.³ The GBPVAW Trend Index takes the National Register of Sanctioned People (RNPS) as source, looking at GBPVAW firm sentences, and its aim is to analyze the severity of GBPVAW conducts. The sources for the Index of Potential GBPVAW are both the Report by the Secretary of the General Council at INE⁴ and the RNPS. It looks at GBPVAW complaints, denouncements and sentences, and aims at complementing the information

¹ It includes data such as the name, sex, position, territorial scope, case file, sentence date, conduct, sanction, sanctioning authority, permanence and recidivism. Available at: <https://portal.ine.mx/actores-politicos/registro-nacional-de-personas-sancionadas/>

² For example, the state of Baja California Sur has 5 municipalities (0.2% of national share), whereas Oaxaca has 570 municipalities (23% of the total share).

³ The full explanation of the methodology, development and weighing of both indexes can be found in Chapter 4, at: <https://igualdad.ine.mx/mujeres-en-lapolitica/violencia-politica/>.

⁴ Full report name: Informe que presenta el Secretario del Consejo General en cumplimiento al artículo 47 del Reglamento de Quejas y Denuncias en Materia de Violencia Política contra las Mujeres en Razón de Género.



Fig. 1 Number of GBPVAW sanctions by federal entity (RNPS). Source: author's own elaboration with RNPS data, July 1st, 2022

including open cases, and cases where the original authorities where complaints were filed declared themselves incompetent and forwarded the cases to other authorities, which is a serious limitation of the current legal framework. It is also useful to quantify the severity of conducts. For the construction of the indicators, based on the RNPS data, three variables were taken as a basis: (i) the number of people sanctioned, (ii) the offense, and (iii) the number of murdered candidates, as a proxy for episodes of the most serious level of GBPVAW that can be exercised. Meanwhile, to assess the seriousness of reported conducts, offenses were classified according to Article 20 Ter of the General Law on Women's Access to a Life Free of Violence, and given the limitations of the Mexican legal framework in relation to conducts, in order to overcome classification biases, contrasting them with Article 6 of the Inter-American Model Law. These indexes can be enriched and compared across time.

According to Fig. 2 outlining the behavior of GBPVAW Trend Index, Veracruz and Oaxaca (in red) stand out, being the states with the greatest number of GBPVAW sanctions, with severe conduct and reporting murders of female candidates. San Luis Potosí (in orange), ranks medium, it has no murders, but has recurrent violent GBPVAW conducts, such as forcing women to quit office. In yellow, we find most south-eastern states, those with the highest social justice challenges, such as Chiapas, Tabasco, Campeche, Quintana Roo, and Yucatan; the central belt states of Hidalgo, Querétaro, Nayarit, Colima, Guanajuato and Jalisco; the last two have a low number of sentences, with mid-range conducts, but they also report murders. To the north, only Sonora and Baja California Sur appear, making it the region with the least GBPVAW filed sentences.

The Index of Potential GBPVAW is presented in Fig. 3. Veracruz and Oaxaca are consistently the states with the highest GBPVAW (red), however, since this



Fig. 2 Regional behavior of the GBPVAW Trend Index. Source: author's own elaboration



Fig. 3 Regional behavior of the Index of Potential GBPVAW. Source: author's own elaboration

index combines frequency with gravity of conducts, we see that eight states from the south, center and north rank medium in orange (Tabasco, San Luis Potosí, Guerrero, State of Mexico, Guanajuato, Zacatecas, Tamaulipas, Coahuila), expressing that the levels of GBPVAW according to expressed conducts are higher in these states. Besides, all states except four (Baja California, Michoacán, Morelos and Tlaxcala) turn yellow.

Together, both indexes are useful indicators of the regional behavior of GBPVAW during the 20–21 FEP. Finding reliable and comparable GBPVAW data is very hard. Originally, the research team filed over a thousand formal information requests

under the Transparency Law, and although we got answers, they were not coherent in the same institutions across distinct states or across time, and some were not complete or contradictory according to different sources. When we interviewed public officials in the same institutions, they reported different data. So, the data from the RNPS and the Report by the Secretary of the General Council at INE is correct, comparable and verifiable. Developing inter-institutional mechanisms for collecting, presenting and analyzing data is a challenge pending following the April 2020 GBPVAW reform. Both indexes developed and presented were designed to be used and enriched across time, enabling deeper analysis.

In order to complement the data from the risk maps and GBPVAW indexes, an exploratory questionnaire was distributed, with open and closed questions, Likert and grading scales, and triangulated questions (regarding their first-hand experience and that of other women in the context of their political participation). It was answered by 60 women participating in the 20–21 FEP from 16 federal states across the country, from all parties and coalitions, with intercultural and intersectional differences, a median age of 41 years, and at least 93% of the sample with university education. Most were candidates for a position during the 20–21 FEP, 55% contended for a municipal position, 16.66% at state level, 11.66% at federal level, and 16.66% were militants actively engaging during the electoral process, some formally pertaining to parties' institutional structure. The marital status of respondents was 38.3% single, 31.66% married, 16.66% in consensual union or in a relationship, 10% divorced or separated, 3.33% widowed. Interestingly, 60% of them had not been members of a political party prior to the 20–21 FEP.

As per the results (see Fig. 4), most identify different types of GBPVAW and have experienced or are facing GBPVAW first-hand, 45% very often, 18.3% moderately, 23.3% rarely, and only 11.66% never (the 1.66% difference responded “does not apply”). In terms of perceived GBPVAW among peers, they consider almost two thirds (61.66%) experience GBPVAW very often, 18.3% moderately, 11.66% rarely and only 1.66% never. In order to clarify if their experiences associated with GBPVAW corresponded to types of violence and conducts outlined by law, they were asked to grade conducts on a Likert scale, if applicable. In terms of *symbolic violence*, they were asked if their party or coalition questions or doubts their capacities given that they are women. Answers are distributed almost in halves, 25% say very often, 20% moderately, 20% rarely and only 26.66% never. Regarding their female peers, this increases to almost two thirds, 33.66% very often, 25% moderately, 8.33% rarely and 18.33% never. The second item was access to political capital, they were asked how often they had been marginalized from negotiations or political activities for being women, 43.33% think very often, 16.66% moderately, 15% seldom and only 20% never. They believe 51.66% of other women are marginalized very often, 23.33% moderately, 8.33% rarely and only 6.66% never. As a whole, they consider that between 75 and 84% of women face obstacles in politics for being women, and only 13.33% never experience obstacles for their gender condition. Regarding dissemination of private information to defame, discredit or question the skills and capacities for politics, 11.66% have experienced that often, 13.33% moderately, 23.33% rarely and 43.33% have never experienced it. They perceive other women experience this often (33.33%), moderately (30%), rarely (15%),

Conducts expressed for gender reasons (“for being women”)	Very Often (%)	Moderately (%)	Rarely (%)	Never (%)	Does not apply (%)
<i>Symbolic violence</i>					
Party or coalition questions/doubts my/female peers capacities	Me: 25 ♀: 33.66	Me: 20 ♀: 25	Me: 20 ♀: 8.33	Me: 26.66 ♀: 18.33	Me: 8.3 ♀: 11.66
Being marginalized from political activities or negotiations	Me: 43.33 ♀: 51.66	Me: 16.66 ♀: 23.33	Me: 15 ♀: 8.33	Me: 20 ♀: 6.66	Me: 5 ♀: 10
Dissemination of private information to defame, discredit or question skills/capacitates	Me: 11.66 ♀: 33.33	Me: 13.33 ♀: 30	Me: 23.33 ♀: 15	Me: 43.33 ♀: 16.66	Me: 8.33 ♀: 5
<i>Political campaigns</i>					
Facing obstacles to register candidacy in 20-21 FEP	Me: 25 ♀: 38.3	Me: 8.33 ♀: 16.6	Me: 13.33 ♀: 20	Me: 38.88 ♀: 13.3	Me: 15 ♀: 11.66
<i>Digital violence</i>					
Gender-based disqualification, aggression and discrimination for participating in politics on social media	Me: 26.66 ♀: 48.33	Me: 20 ♀: 26.66	Me: 26.66 ♀: 13.33	Me: 21.66 ♀: 3.33	Me: 5 ♀: 8.33
<i>Sexual violence</i>					
Experience of harassment, assault or abuse	Me: 20 ♀: 41.66	Me: 18.33 ♀: 25	Me: 25 ♀: 13.33	Me: 33.33 ♀: 11.66	Me: 3.33 ♀: 8.33
<i>Physical violence</i>					
	Me: 10 ♀: 26.66	Me: 16.66 ♀: 31.66	Me: 15 ♀: 18.33	Me: 50 ♀: 13.33	Me: 8.33 ♀: 10
<i>Political femicide</i>					
Experience fear of being assassinated for political career as woman	Me: 25 ♀: 38.33	Me: 11.66 ♀: 16.66	Me: 20 ♀: 21.66	Me: 40 ♀: 13.33	Me: 3.33 ♀: 10
<i>Economic violence</i>					
Women have the same economic conditions as men to participate in elections as candidates?	0 unequal 4.06 average..... 10 equal				
<i>Democracy in political parties</i>					
How much democracy exists within political parties?	0 none 3.7 average..... 10 a lot				
<i>GBPVAW Legal Framework</i>					
Do you know the legal framework typifying and sanctioning GBPVAW?	0 does not know it 4.3 average 10 knows it				
<i>Organized Crime</i>					
How much does organized crime interfere in electoral processes?	0 nothing 6.7 average..... 10 all				

Fig. 4 Results of the 2021 GBPVAW questionnaire. Source: author’s own elaboration. Note: Results relate to respondent’s direct and first-hand experience of GBPVAW (Me), and also to their perception of female peers’ experience in the context of politics (♀)

and only 16.66% never. That is to say, from often and moderate first-hand experience in 25%, they perceive it goes to 63.3% in other women’s experience in the political field.

Regarding their *political campaigns*, they were asked if they faced obstacles to register as candidates for the elections, 25% responded that many, 8.33% moderate, 13.33% few and 38.88% none. Regarding their female peers, they consider they faced many challenges to register (38.33%), 16.66 moderate, 20% few and only 13.33% none. This indicates that despite the many advances in legislation and the fines imposed, in practice these guarantees are not always met. To assess *economic violence*, respondents were asked, in a scale from 0 (unequal conditions) to 10 (equal conditions) to what extent they consider women have the same economic conditions

to aspire for a position and to participate in elections as candidates. The law is very strict with resource distribution. Nevertheless, according to their response structural inequalities and party inequalities are highly relevant, and men have six times more economic advantages than women to participate in politics.

Digital violence is an increasing trend, and it became especially significant in the electoral process during the pandemic. We asked about gender-based disqualification, aggression, and discrimination for participating in politics on social media, women experienced digital violence very often (26.66%), moderately (20%), rarely (26.66%), and never (21.66%), that is to say, three quarters have experienced it first-hand, and one fifth has never experienced it. As for the triangulated results, their perception of their peers, they consider only 3.33% has never experienced it, whereas 48.33% often, 26.66% moderate, and 13.33% seldom.

Regarding *sexual violence*, to the question if as a result of their political participation, they had experienced sexual harassment, assault or abuse, 20% said very often, 18.33% moderately, 25% rarely, and 33.33% never. Regarding their peers, answers almost double, 41.66% frequently, 25% moderately, 13.33% rarely, and 11.66% never. As for experiencing *physical violence* (blows, shoves, threats to their physical integrity) as a result of their political participation, 10% report it frequently, 16.66% moderately, 15% seldom, and 50% never having experienced it. So only half of female respondents have never experienced first-hand physical violence for participating in politics. As for their perception of female peers, they consider 26.66% experience physical violence regularly, 31.66% moderately, 18.33% seldom, and only 13.33% never. In terms of the most acute form of violence, *femicide*, we asked them how often they are afraid of being assassinated in their political career as women, 25% are frequently afraid, 11.66% moderately, 20% seldom, and 40% has never been afraid. They consider other women are constantly (38.33%), moderately (16.66%), seldom (21.66%), and never (13.33%) afraid of being murdered for their political participation. These results confirm the importance of the functioning of GBPVAW violence as an expressive message. It is not realistic that 60% of women participating in politics get murdered, however, the threats that some women have experienced together with the increasing number of female politicians and candidates being assassinated, as well as the violence with which they were killed, highly visible through social and mass media, does convey a worrying and violent message to women, that could easily discourage their participation in the political sphere. Politics is a masculinized arena, with hegemonic power, rules and interests, which are exercised by all means, including all forms of violence. When asked how much democracy they believe exist within political parties, from 0 (none) to 10 (a lot), the average was 3.7. In terms of knowledge of the GBPVAW Reform Decree of April 2020, 43% of respondents know it, and 57% does not. Besides, in the Mexican context, organized crime makes democracy and the rule of law fragile. To the question regarding their perception of the degree of interference by organized crime in electoral processes in their community or environment, from 1 (nothing) to 10 (a lot), the average was 6.7.

Qualitative analysis derived from first-hand research data collected from 150 in-depth interviews (75 to women contending in politics at all levels across the country and 75 to GBPVAW experts: academics, public servants, journalists,

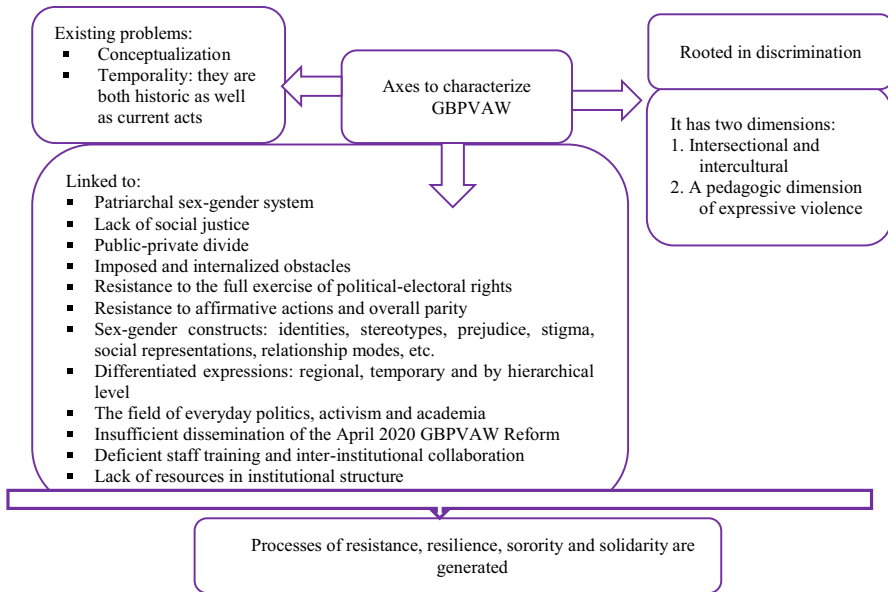


Fig. 5 Characterization axes of GBPVAW. Source: Author's elaboration

activists and academics), 13,500 min of interviews transcribed and analyzed, following a feminist standpoint epistemology (Blázquez et al. 2012) as 'preferred bias', with the aim of giving women voice and reflecting their GBPVAW experiences. Traditional analysis was complemented by thematic content analysis, following grounded theory and microanalysis the typologies, categories and associated contents were established. Subsequently, a code list was established, and a core-periphery thematic analysis was undertaken, broken down into global, organizing and basic codes. Alongside eleven categories that will be presented and summarized in this section, Fig. 5 presents a summary characterization of GBPVAW axes.

3.1 GBPVAW characterization-origins, evolution of the concept and validity

GBPVAW as concept was established in Mexico in the April 13th 2020 Reform Decree. It has an essential gender component, and it refers to violence that disproportionately affects women for being women, differently than men. Furthermore, it takes place for participating in politics, both in electoral processes as well as once in office. Likewise, it characterizes both the public and private spheres, and includes direct actions and omissions, including tolerance. It is a form of gendered violence that aims at limiting, impairing and overriding the effective exercise of political-electoral rights.

3.2 Conceptual precision

Four trends were identified: (i) *conceptual stretching*: the legal conceptualization following the reform is pertinent, it was over-stretched in order to enable the legal system to overcome attackers' maneuvers, the current challenge is to disseminate it; (ii) *cat-dog-tiger concept*: a discussion following Sartori regarding what is comparable, how to compare and why, stating that the resulting concept is a problematic *bricolage*, an unrecognizable concept, with significant challenges in terms of legislative harmonization and sanctions; (iii) *legal shrinkage*: the narrow conception of politics and women's political participation, restricted to political-electoral and party affairs, are questioned. Also, the fact that the understanding of law is reduced to a criminal, punitive and administrative electoral outlook. This leaves out the complexity of cultural contexts and makes case-evaluation difficult; and (iv) *conceptual emptying*: criticizing the administration of justice, the impossibility of accessing the protection of the law given the lack of budgets and institutional capacities, the fact that complaints are not upheld or that even if there is an advanced legislation, actions are difficult to verify, a misuse of GBPAW accusations, a strategic simulation around GBPAW, and a lack of indicators to follow-up cases at institutional level.

3.3 Awareness of GBPAW in women participating in politics

This is a process, linked to knowledge of gender, of making visible and not naturalizing aspects of the sex-gender system, of the fact that despite gender advances political culture remains unaltered, and its misogynistic overtones have been socially and historically justified. Some women consider GBPAW as a price to pay, yet others quit politics altogether. Building alternatives is crucial, there are peers and groups that provide significant support in terms of awareness of and facing GBPAW.

3.4 GBPAW by level

There are significant overt and subtle differences in the ways that GBPAW operates at local and federal level. In a highly centralized country such as Mexico, GBPAW becomes more sophisticated, subtle, more carefully monitored, even better understood conceptually at federal level. Resources and cultural codes are enlarged, so female politicians are more aware of it, and they have greater political power to bargain. Unfortunately, they are also knowledgeable of the cost that denouncing GBPAW in their parties may have for their careers, so they often remain silent as a strategy to consolidate their careers. At local level, GBPAW is overflowed and women have, in general, less social, economic and political resources. Territorial control is tighter, interest groups are stronger, more homogeneous, and authorities seem more complicit. Often there is a revolving door. Women report more frequent and severe actions of GBPAW as persistent practices at local level they operate as systematic and deeply engrained processes. Participation and political capitals are conditioned, party leaders and news and

social media outlets have agreements. The punishments for not complying, for questioning GBPVAV or for filing a complaint may be subtle or overt. They go from losing capitals, having initiatives put on the freezer, getting blocked, political mobbing, etc. There is a higher risk of institutional revictimization at local level, that is to say, women prefer not to file complaints since the authorities in charge or justice may be acquainted or even be appointed by political parties. There is also a backlash response that operates as a quotidian pedagogy of systematic exclusion. The advances in female political participation have been met by cultural resistance, men, territorial interest groups and political elites feel threatened by increasing female power, so on the one hand they invite women they control into politics to act as ‘political puppets’ (this had been documented in the Mexican case since quota systems started), and on the other hand they respond with violent actions in order to uphold the traditional system of politics, in order to deter women’s independent participation and instruct them on what “should be their place”.

3.5 The COVID-19 pandemic

The pandemic of the pandemic refers to the ‘cultural virus’ of gendered violence, the ways it expressed itself and was reinforced by the COVID-19 pandemic. It has structural inequalities and lack of social justice as backdrop, the care ethics and lack of democracy in the domestic sphere, as well as specific forms of making politics and political campaigns that make it impossible mostly for women to have access to traditional ways of political negotiations, spaces and schedules that are typically or exclusively masculine.

3.6 Generalized social insecurity

Together with illegality and organized crime are factors that weaken the rule of law, territorial control and the monopoly of violence, making the State fragile. It prevents the full development of life and politics, threatening and targeting the participation of women in specific ways.

3.7 Femicidal violence as context of GBPVAV

All women candidates assassinated during the 20–21 FEP aspired to a position at municipal level. Even if the murders are not typified as GBPVAV, the fact that there is impunity in the murder of women in politics, sends a message of fear to other women, inhibiting their participation. The lack of consequences of murdering women and women in politics also sends a message of impunity to men and groups of political power, exacerbating femicidal and other forms of gendered violence and GBPVAV.

3.8 Key aggressors-political parties

According to the RNPS and to interviews, during the 20–21 FEP, the main visible aggressive agents in terms of GBPAW were political parties, to a lesser extent mass media and socio-digital networks. In order to confirm and contrast results, at the end of the 20–21 FEP, we asked for additional interviews with all local electoral institutes and state Electoral Attorney's Offices, we got 23 in-depth interviews in the former and 14 in the latter. They were asked to highlight the main aggressor agents and the main obstacles to eradicating GBPAW. The main aggressors are political parties (political party elites, presidents of political parties, fellow party members, political leaders, party militants and sympathizers), mass media, press, and social media, men, candidates from other political parties, the public, people in office and peers (municipal presidents, syndics, treasurers, local council members), public servants and heads of public institutions, electoral institutions, organized crime, family members and partners, other women. The main obstacles identified are cultural (normalization of violence, reproduction of gender roles, patriarchal cultural forms, discrimination, lack of knowledge or acceptance of gender equality and gender perspective, objectification of women, violence based on women's appearance), reproduced by mass media (lack of training in gender perspective, language inclusiveness), institutional (lack of human and economic resources, no institutional support, absence of protocols, cases exceed institutional capacities), political parties (authoritarianism in political parties, resistance to affirmative action by members and leaders, lack of training in party executives and leaders, poor training to women participating in politics, limiting financial resources for women), structural (lack of gender and social justice), contextual (normalization of violence at municipal level, violence aiming at the close entourage of female candidates, generalized violence at local level, organized crime and trafficking), circumstantial (the COVID-19 pandemic, technological gap), and gender-specific (most women do not report crimes for fear, lack of resources or knowledge, no legal counseling or back-up, and they are ashamed to recognize themselves as victims, they fear aggressors' and parties' retaliation).

3.9 April 13th 2020 reform

It is weighted in terms of successes and areas of opportunity. The positive aspects are its much-needed genesis, the conceptualization and legal framework, its approval is welcomed, the visibility it gives to GBPAW, the legislative harmonization that ought to follow, as well as the legal and institutional framework it encompasses. The challenges relate to the limitations of the electoral and legal route, its implementation and sanctions, to the time and resources necessary to gain justice, to certain topics and conducts that are difficult to prove, to the groups of women participating in politics left without protection, to the lack of resources and GBPAW-specific budgets, to the precarious inter-institutional coordination, to the will and commitment of public servants, many of whom resist change and lack a human rights and

gender perspective, as well as to the much-needed change at structural and societal level.

3.10 3 by 3 against violence (“tres de tres contra la violencia”)

Following the Reform Decree in April 2020, the National Electoral Institute implemented this mechanism (agreements INE/CG517/2020, INE/CG691/2020) that had been designed by the feminist NGO *Las Constituyentes CDMX*. It asks all candidates for public positions to submit a sworn declaration “in good faith” meeting three requirements: (i) not having any gender violence-related records, (ii) not having any sexual offense records, (iii) not being registered as alimony debtors or paying the full debt. INE takes a random sample and verifies. This innovative initiative has been credited with enormous support, although some challenges persist. The original proposal related to criminal precedents, but the official agreement was firm sentences, which are scarce. What does this entail in terms of presumption of innocence? Some cases are open for decades, some are outlawed given time frames and some put to freeze given complicit local authorities. In other cases, aggressors have paid their sentence. In addition, the information regarding the three criteria are not openly public records, people declare falsely, there is no national register of alimony debtors (the initiative has been put to the freezer at the legislative chambers). In addition, there are important critiques to political party heads protecting their candidates and not putting GBPVAV more than as a discursive priority. Furthermore, the mechanism through which their candidacy was taken, was not for gender violence, but for lying and thus losing the ‘honest way of living’. In the 20–21 FEP, out of three withdrawn candidatures from the sample by INE, two contenders got them back from the electoral tribunal, following a discussion that a sentence as gender-offenders does not mean they lost the honest way of living.

3.11 RNPS

The RNPS is highly relevant for GBPVAV, although there are significant aspects to refine, such as the duration of registers (given that some sanctions are so short—a few days—they are taken as a message or impunity and ridicule, instead of justice); the phenomenon of recidivism (for example, a man with eight sanctions); the level at which GBPVAV is exercised and the authority judging, given that the municipal level predominates; the characteristics of aggressors, the geographical distribution, behavior and the territorial characteristics of the records.

The goal of the **study of news media and socio-digital networks** was to analyze the characterization that private news media and Twitter make of female pre-candidates and candidates in their multiple identity dimensions, when during the 20–21 FEP they experienced GBPVAV. Out of a total of 191 news pieces analyzed, five cases were identified that account for the four trends in media coverage that the news media and Twitter had when the women who experienced GBPVAV in the 20–21 FEP were subject to journalistic monitoring. The four trends identified are: (1) femicide, (2) reinforcement of the patriarchal pact, (3) generation of

media courts and trials, and (4) systematic obstruction of political campaigns. Findings highlight that 76% of GBPVAV observed in media was symbolic, 37% physical and 21% sexual. The contents violated women's public representation rights by 85%, their rights to be voted by 79% and gender equality by 61%. The actors who engaged in violent behaviors were other candidates (48%), and the media and their staff (36%). The five cases identified are: (1) Ivonne Gallegos, pre-candidate in the municipality of Ocotlán, Oaxaca [trend "femicide"]. Media coverage omitted her identity as a female politician victim of femicide. She was labeled as "shot candidate", "murdered" or "executed". Coverage silenced her identity as a woman politician, a feminist, a leader in indigenous territories, up until then an independent aspirant that was negotiating with political parties, and it privileged –without due contrast and verification of sources–the statements by the National Action Party (PAN) that falsely declared her as their candidate. (2) Clara Enríquez Merlín, pre-candidate in the municipality of Cosoleacaque, Veracruz [trend "femicide"]. Her political identity was subjected to her role as daughter, or to the type of physical violence she was subjected to. Labeled as "executed", "daughter of...", "mother and daughter murdered". The leak of information that is under reserve as part of the judicial process also accounts for the remanence of mass media and institutional practices that violate the rights and electoral rights of women and hinder the implementation of democratic and violent-free processes. (3) Rocío Moreno Sánchez, candidate in the municipality of Juchipila, Zacatecas [trend "patriarchal pact"]. Her political-electoral rights were three times violated: (i) the sexual "touching" by his party colleague David Monreal, candidate for governor of the state Zacatecas; (ii) the filtering and hypermediatization of the video that omits her identity and labels her as "spanked", "spanked candidate"; (iii) the subsequent public exoneration of Monreal through a statement. The discussion reinforced gender stereotypes that conceive women only as sexual objects. (4) Clara Luz Flores Carrales, candidate for governor in the state of Nuevo León [trend "generation of media courts and trials"]. She experienced GBPVAV after the propagation of a video leaked from the private to the public sphere, in which she holds a conversation in 2016 with Keith Raniere who was charged in 2018 for sexual trafficking. In Twitter, she was criticized under the hashtag "#LadySect". News articles disqualified her decision-making capacity and her being a female political leader, stating things such as "these are the recommendations Raniere gives Clara Luz on how to govern". (5) Lupita Jones de Garay, candidate for governor in the state of Baja California [trend "systematic obstruction of political campaigns"]. News outlets tended to omit all three GBPVAV conducts of opposing candidate Hank Rhon, favoring him in a context where hostile electoral practices are reinforced and endorsed against women in politics: (i) disqualified her as "garbage"; (ii) exhibiting how her party (PRI), turned its back on her in order to support him; (iii) leaked –without due contrast and verification of sources– Jones' statements about alleged bribery by Rhon. Altogether, this media study shows the need for mechanisms that enhance media narratives with gender perspective, especially in times of elections.

Resilience and alternatives to GBPVAV. Besides highlighting the significant challenges relating to GBPVAV in Mexico in this research, documenting processes of resilience and alternatives that women as individuals and collectives

have developed in order to face and overcome gender-based political violence was indispensable. Resilience is understood as a dynamic and systemic concept, through which both individual and social work, relations and resources help to respond and overcome adversity, however aiming also at transforming society. Following 26 in-depth interviews centered on resilience with women politicians participating in the 20–21 FEP, internal, relational and external resilience factors were identified, as well as axes to consider in the route to resilience. There are five main personal (internal) factors that facilitate resilience in the face of GBPVAV: (i) the ability for introspection, (ii) strengthening of self-esteem, (iii) flexibility to rethink or modify actions and projects, (iv) development of creative strategies in the face of GBPVAV, and (v) actions of reporting GBPVAV and demands for justice. Among relational factors that promote resilience, we find clarity (communicating clear information regarding the crisis and expectations), emotional expression (feelings are shared without judgments, they are not retroflected not projected), and collaboration in problem-solving (actions are developed in an organized manner in order to minimize and overcome GBPVAV). Among external factors, the support generated through social actions such as empathy, solidarity, and development of collective strategies and victim support groups. The social spaces and trajectories generated by families, friends, communities and other women in politics, especially feminist women in politics, are crucial. Besides, the public dimension is relevant, the social, normative, institutional and political entourage, considering cultural, juridical and institutional factors, and their interrelation. Becoming empowered, and realizing that GBPVAV does not determine their identities, projects, relationships and lives, but that they can make choices regarding GBPVAV is indispensable. Reporting and making GBPVAV visible is important, as is accounting for social justice. Nevertheless, it is indispensable not to overlook resilience, as a complex and dialectical process, which generates routes for social transformation. Recognizing resilience as a process that involves interacting personal, relational and sociocultural factors, it is possible to overcome GBPVAV and its challenges.

4 Concluding remarks

It is time to consider shifting from affirmative responses in the face of injustice, to transformative solutions that may reconfigure the framework that originates them. As has been analyzed during the FEP 2021, in order to be deeply effective, the April 2020 GBPVAV Reform Decree needs to be accompanied by politics and policies of redistribution, recognition and representations, of social justice with intersectional gender participatory parity. Recommendations are displayed in seven dimensions following the axes of the research model.

1. GBPVAV Regulatory framework

- (i) One must know how to apply laws, since it is not very useful to have GBPVAV typified, a catalog of sanctions and procedures, if judges are not trained in terms of this norm and gender perspective.

- (ii) Expanding the GBPVAV concept, considering women elected and also appointed for office, women in formal and informal politics, such as human rights defenders, journalists, researchers, etc. who are exposed to GBPVAV given their work. Also, the concept should integrate the effects (physical and psychological) of the acts of GBPVAV as part of reparation measures.
- (iii) Reframing the 3 by 3 against gender violence mechanism, with clear jurisdictional authority and a straightforward justification of the honest way of living, raising ethical standards for all candidates and society.
- (iv) Reconsidering the criteria, temporal frame, jurisdictional authority and competence, recidivism, inter-institutional collaboration, opening to the public the historical register for long-term comparable data generation.

2. Law enforcement institutions (instances)

- (i) Training and certifying authorities with a human rights and gender perspective.
- (ii) In terms of transparency and accountability, authorities must be committed and made accountable to report reliable facts and figures.
- (iii) Institutional protocols and guidelines must be developed, including performance evaluation indicators of authorities and systematic, inter-institutional and public monitoring of GBPVAV.
- (iv) Consider legal mechanisms to provide protection to women who work as public servants and experience GBPVAV, even if they are appointed and not elected to positions.
- (v) Encourage a culture of legality, of reporting offenses in general terms, and GBPVAV in particular.

3. Media and social networks

- (i) Extend sanctions towards mass media, including socio-digital networks.
- (ii) The General Law of Electoral Institutions and Procedures (LGIPE) includes sanction to political parties for misuse of TV and radio spots, however it does not include use of other media such as socio-digital networks. The Inter-American Model Law emphasizes the responsibility of communication media as potential agents of GBPVAV, since they are among the agents that most reproduce stereotypes regarding women. It proposes actions that would be pertinent to include in Mexican regulations, such as:
 - (a) Development and dissemination of guidelines to help eradicate GBPVAV
 - (b) Avoiding all expressions that discredit women based on gender stereotypes
 - (c) Secure observance of women's political rights
 - (d) Ensure respect for women's reputations
 - (e) Condemn acts of GBPVAV through ethic codes.

4. Political parties

- (i) Effective application of the General Law of Political Parties (LGPP), it is considered as one of the most complete frameworks in legal terms, but it is also one of the least applied.
- (ii) Training in GBPVAV and gender perspective within political parties, both at the base level and in elite groups, addressed to both men and women.
- (iii) Monitor and effectively sanction political parties that fail to comply with the law, especially when they redirect their budget items specifically labeled for affirmative action in favor of women towards other priorities, or when they do not grant sufficient budget to female candidates or give them late or provide payment in kind, usually giving them materials that highlight the party or male party heads, rendering the female candidates invisible.
- (iv) Generate incentives, prizes or making publicly visible the protocols and 'good practices' that political parties have in terms of GBPVAV.

5. Intersectionality and interculturality

- (i) Prepare and implement specific programs in order to prevent, investigate, and when appropriate, prosecute and punish cases of serious misconduct by police officers and other law enforcement officers, motivated by discrimination.
- (ii) Promote public policies of social justice in key sectors of the population and for people in situations of vulnerability or discrimination, such as indigenous people, Afro-descendants, sexual-diversity groups, Mexican migrant population based in the USA, people with disabilities, prioritizing women.
- (iii) Make public defender offices specializing on GBPVAV and/or regionally strategic specialized areas of attention for GBPVAV.
- (iv) Promote regional diagnoses to learn more specific realities in terms of GBPVAV.
- (v) Generate a critical reflection regarding the importance of interculturality and intersectionality in GBPVAV.
- (vi) Protect and promote the political participation of ethnic and sexual diversity, as well as making the agendas of people elected to represent the interest of these groups, establishing guidelines and sanctions to avoid simulation in affirmative actions, the usurpation of identities or even including these actions as GBPVAV conducts.
- (vii) Promote dissemination campaigns through native languages with the participation of community radios, civil society organizations, local electoral authorities and institutes and prosecutors.

6. Party democracy and substantive equality Specific budgets for:

- (i) Designing protocols and specialized spaces for a sustained and comprehensive accompaniment and care of women who participate in politics, as well as GBPVAV victims.
- (ii) Create spaces with highly specialized multidisciplinary staff to deal with GBPVAV in the institutions that lack them.
- (iii) Train public and private agents, as well as civil society members, such as activists and jurists to defend women for GBPVAV.
- (iv) Generate broader measures to guarantee substantive equality and full participation of women in politics.

7. Resilience and alternative building

- (i) Training and checks for electoral authorities not to reproduce a patriarchal pact of protection and impunity of aggressors.
- (ii) Build processes of protection for women, families and defense groups that accompany victims of GBPVAV (protection from re-victimization to women who have sought justice reporting GBPVAV, for their family members and human rights defendants is urgent).
- (iii) Promote an education with a human rights and gender perspective at basic and higher levels, including intercultural diversity and equality.
- (iv) Encourage studies and comparative research in areas that impact on GBPVAV. Undertake exhaustive and impartial GBPVAV research.
- (v) Generate sorority circles, both for women of the same political parties, but also among women from other parties. This may also be important in order to create indicators of GBPVAV and to document and encourage resilience and alternatives to GBPVAV.

GBPVAV is a growing area of research, and it will likely be included in most national legal frameworks in the near future. The research agenda benefits from a social justice perspective that goes beyond and complements the juridical discussion. A triangulated, multidisciplinary, regional, case-study specific outlook is favorable to document, analyze and even to set guidelines that may have a significant impact on public policies regarding GBPVAV. Regarding the case study of Mexico, the Reform Decree of April 13th, 2020 typifying GBPVAV is celebrated providing the country with the second most advanced legislation worldwide. However, this research documented that there are still multiple areas of opportunity linked to affirmative action, substantive equality and transversal parity. Mexico has a deeply verticalized and verticalizing political system, and although the State has signed all treaties promoting horizontal governance *de jure*, this has not been achieved *de facto*. Significant challenges to reach an effective governance persist, in order to forge a social order based on non-discrimination and transversal gender equality. Likewise, it is necessary to account for the efforts that link everyday activism from civil society, with the realities in political parties, institutions and the specialized knowledge stemming from academia. This in order to generate and foster processes of resilience, solidarity, sorority and also resistance.

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Data availability The datasets generated during and/or analysed during the current study are available in Spanish in the Technical Unity of Gender Equality and Nondiscrimination repository, at the National Electoral Institute (INE), for more information contact the corresponding author or visit: <https://igualdad.ine.mx/mujeres-en-lapolitica/violencia-politica/>.

Declarations

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