

## ALGORITHMS AND GENDER POLITICAL VIOLENCE: THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL NETWORKS ON THE POLITICAL TRAJECTORY OF WOMEN



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### ABSTRACT

Considering the participation of women in politics, it is possible to analyze how this is affected by gender political violence. From a discussion focused on the use of disinformation and social networks, an analysis was proposed on how these digital tools influence female political participation and amplify gender political violence in Brazil. For this, the deductive method was used through a bibliographic and documentary research. The text is structured in three sections, in addition to the introduction and final considerations: in the first section, the trajectory of women in the political sphere is presented, including cases of gender political violence in digital environments, with the objective of highlighting the importance of the theme and its data; In the second, gender political violence is conceptualized and how it affects female participation, subraying its relevance in the formulation of public policies. Finally, we use the concept of surveillance capitalism, described by Shoshana Zuboff, to discuss the influence of artificial intelligence and algorithms in the trajectory of women in political positions in the Brazilian context.

**Keywords:** Algorithms. Disinformation. Social Networks. Gender-Based Political Violence.

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## INTRODUCTION

The data of the Interparliamentary Union, which brings together national legislators worldwide, indicate that only a little more than 10% of federal deputies in Brazil are women. This index is 154 out of 193 nations, only for some regions of the Middle East, Arab countries and Polynesian islands (Santos, 2017). This shows how the inequality between men and women in the sphere of power is a persistent reality. As Sabino y Lima (2015, p. 713) points out: "in no way in the sphere of social life is the participation of women and men as unequal as in the exercise of power". Despite the fact that women constitute the majority of the population and the Brazilian electorate, their presence in the spheres of political decision continues to be alarmingly reduced, especially in comparison with their demographic representation. Although significant advances have been made in recent decades for women's political citizenship, there is still a profound inequality in the occupation of positions of power by the majority of women.

As according to Costa y Gonçalves (2021), the female occupation in spaces of power is essential to promote public policies oriented to women, which makes this representation a fundamental element. The trajectory of women in Brazilian politics, from the conquest of the right to the vote to the occupation of leadership positions, underscores the importance of female representation and reveals the wide path that has not fallen for resorting. The inequality between men and women in the political environment remains alarming and persistent. As Bertolin y Alves (2023, p. 60) states: "in the history of the Brazilian electoral plebiscite, not a few times has the political environment been a scenario of psychological, mediatic and physical violence", acts that, in some cases, lead to causing resignations from positions or candidacies, reflecting the impunity that often accompanies these episodes. This so-called political violence disproportionately affects vulnerable groups, especially women.

Since the 2018 elections, this dynamic has been more evident with the proliferation of "fake news", a phenomenon that has transformed digital media into an attractive space for the practice of political violence, particularly against women. The speed with which false information is disseminated, in addition to the lack of effective mechanisms to combat disinformation, has betrayed devastating consequences for female participation in politics (Bertolin; Alves, 2023). In this way, political violence is not only an individual issue, but also an amenity to democracy, since it compromises the public freedoms of the entire city. The persistence of this hostility is configured as one of the main obstacles to the insertion and

permanence of women in positions of power, since these practices seek to discourage participation at all levels (Marielle Franco Institute, 2021). Therefore, this paper aims to explore how the intersection between gender political violence, disinformation and the use of social networks configures the scenario of female political participation in Brazil. In the digital world, power is exercised through the control of algorithms and infrastructures, essential elements for decision-making and influence on individuals and organizations (Nonato, 2023).

This concern has grown steadily, given that it influences people and their behavior and can shape public opinion, reduce trust in institutions and affect electoral results, directly impacting liberal democracy in Brazil (Nonato, 2023). In this context, based on the analysis of female participation in the political sphere, this study aims to understand how women's actions are impacted by gender-based political violence, aggravated by the use of social networks and misinformation. It seeks to examine how these digital tools influence the political trajectory of women, exposing them to new forms of violence, from the following question: ¿de qué manera los algoritmos de las redes sociales influyen en la trayectoria de las mujeres en la carrera política, amplificando los efectos de la desinformación y de la violencia política de género?

The methodology used was based on a deductive approach, based on established theoretical concepts on gender political violence and the influence of social networks on female political participation. From these premises, empirical information and specific cases are analyzed that show how these phenomena are manifested in the Brazilian context. This approach allows us to understand the theme from the existing literature and understand how the dynamics of power and digital control impact on the political trajectory of women, offering a critical perspective on the barriers and challenges they face in the political sphere. The research carried out combines bibliographic and documentary methods, referring to books, disertaciones, articles, documents, reports and other productions on the subject.

## **THE BRAZILIAN SCENARIO: CHALLENGES FOR WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION**

According to Costa y Gonçalves (2021), in a space dominated by men, women face an extreme difficulty to gain respect, in a process marked by cultural challenges that are more than beyond the mere strength of volunteers. This environment is characterized by an

inherent privilege of man in political decisions and positions, the result of the dichotomy between the public, reserved for men, and the private, intended for women. This limits the opportunities for development in predominantly male public spaces, making it difficult for women to be inserted in historically exclusive environments. In this context, it is crucial to highlight the trajectory of women in Brazilian politics.

Carvalho and Yasuda (2017) found that, in 1910, Leolinda Daltro founded the Women's Republican Party, convirtiéndose en la primera mujer en establecer una asociación femenina com el objetivo de la reclama la participación electoral de las mujeres. In addition, the foundation of the Brazilian Federation for Women's Progress (FBPF) in 1922, led by Bertha Lutz, marked a significant milestone in the women's suffragette movement. This group brought together Brazilian women in the struggle for their rights, promoting feminist policies in the public sphere and seeking reforms in the legal position of women, as well as the development of a social justice platform. However, the Electoral Code and the Electoral Justice were only established on February 24, 1932, instituyendo el derecho al voto para ambos sexos. In this context, women were authorized to vote on an optional basis, although they did not hold paid public positions (Fonseca; Fachin, 2020).

Decree No. 21,076, drafted with the participation of Bertha Lutz, guaranteed the female vote as a fundamental right for the full exercise of the city. However, electoral enlistment was optional and was conditional on matrimonial power for married women, and economic autonomy for widows and singles (Carvalho; Yasuda, 2017). In the National Constituent Assembly of 1933, three women were postulated: Carlota Pereira de Queiroz, Bertha Maria Júlia Lutz and Leolinda de Figueiredo Daltro. However, only Carlota Pereira de Queiroz managed to be elected, convirtiéndose así en la primera diputada federal de Brasil by popular vote (Fonseca; Fachin, 2020).

Between 1932 and 1963, only four women occupied a space in the Chamber of Deputies: Carlota Pereira de Queiroz, Bertha Maria Júlia Lutz, Cândida Ivete Vargas Martins and Leolina Barbosa de Souza Costa (also known as Nita Costa). In the Senate, the first woman to occupy the position of senator was elected in 1979 (Fonseca; Fachin, 2020). This highlights the barriers that women face in politics, reflecting a predominantly male space, rooted in social and cultural norms that limit their performance in this sphere.

The Federal Constitution, enacted in 1988 and based on the principle of equality, seeks to guarantee equity through various legal provisions. Its objective is to eliminate any

type of inequality or discrimination against women (Fonseca; Fachin, 2020). However, according to Jares y Souza (2024), although women have been able to claim democratic mechanisms for their participation, electoral and party systems continue to show resistance to adapt to the need for a greater female representation.

Carvalho and Yasuda (2017) highlight that, although the establishment of the right to vote means a recognition of the female figure as an elector, women continue to face great difficulties to participate in the elections. Law 9.100/95 was an important milestone on this issue, since it established a minimum of 20% of female candidates per coalition.

Subsequently, a project was presented to increase this percentage to 30%, which resulted in the enactment of Law 9.504/97, replacing the previous legislation. Esta política de cuotas puede considerarse un paso esencial para la inclusión de las mujeres en la política, ya que representó la primera medida concreta en este sentido, generando transformaciones iniciales. The legislation remained unchanged until 2009, when the requirement was established that at least 30% of the candidacies registered in each party the coalition was of women (Fonseca; Fachin, 2020).

"Although there is a law of cuotas para las mujeres en los partidos y coaliciones, todavía persiste una gran disparidad en comparación con los hombres" (Costa; Gonçalves, 2021, p. 104). According to Sabino y Lima (2015), even with the advances promoted by these laws, male dominance in the political sphere has not been significantly affected. Esto se debe a que las leyes, aunque importantes, tienen una capacidad limitada para modificar la lógica del proceso electoral en el país, promovndo solo parcialmente la inclusión de nuevos actores. Costa y Gonçalves (2021) also highlight the lack of incentives for women to perform active roles within parties or launch their candidacies, which is reflected in the low indices of female participation in politics. In addition, the existence of false candidacies or "naranjas", created solely to comply with the cuotas, subraya como algunos partidos burlan el sistema.

"El escenario político, espacio de decisiones, también se configura como un escenario de exclusión y prejuicio contra la mujer" (Sabino; Lima, 2015, p. 715). Thus, female participation in Brazilian politics is inevitably influenced by the way in which machismo is manifested in front of women in puestos traditionally occupied by men. This phenomenon is reflected in low participation rates, influenced by cultural practices that perpetuate limiting stereotypes about the female gender, discriminatory laws and restricted access to education for women (Costa; Gonçalves, 2021). This is also evident in the data

presented by Seabra and Brant (2023), who indicate that, although women constitute the majority of the Brazilian electorate (53%), only lead 5 of the 31 political parties registered in the country. This underrepresentation was clear in the general elections of 2022: for the position of governor, no woman was elected, and of the 224 candidacies, only 9 corresponded to women. In the case of the Senate, out of 243 candidacies, only 7 were women, resulting in the election of only 2 (TSE, [n.d.]).

## **POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND GENDER POLITICAL VIOLENCE**

Female political participation is a topic of paramount importance to consider the need to incorporate diverse narratives into the formulation of public policies, as well as to promote democracy with an egalitarian character. According to Costa y Gonçalves (2021), female participation in Brazilian politics is inevitably conditioned by the way in which machismo manifests itself to finding women in prestigious puestos, mostly occupied by men. Consequently, this marginalisation is reproduced in the political sphere, since the positions of power have historically been occupied by men. This shows a significant lack of female representation in Brazil in the decision-making process, which converted this scope into a space of exclusion and prejudice against women (Sabino; Lima, 2015).

In this context, women have been able to cope with misogynistic attacks transmitted by the media and social networks, regardless of their political or ideological positions. Thus, the female voice is deeply impacted by machismo and the prejudices that pervade the public sphere (Costa; Gonçalves, 2021). Esta limitada integración femenina en un ecenadamente masculino genera múltiples problemáticas relacionadas con la implementación de políticas públicas dirigidas a las mujeres. As according to Santos (2023, p. 47): "¿Cómo gobernar a quien no se conoce?". At the end and at the end, it is essential that women are present in this space of power so that effective public policies can be developed for this part of the population. The identity of the government can directly influence the types of public policies that are implemented (Costa; Gonçalves, 2021).

However, it is important to highlight that the low rates of female participation should not be interpreted as the result of the lack of interest of women or of a gender veto by the parties, but as a multicausal phenomenon (Finamore; Carvalho, 2006). According to Bertolin y Alves (2023), the role of women has historically been limited to domestic activities and the childishness of children, which has created a relationship of dependence and domination of men over women. This division of tareas contributed to the



institutionalization of patriarchal political power, justifying the exclusion of women from political and economic participation in society, depriving them of access to the public sphere.

In this context of domination, female political representation is fundamental to promote a more egalitarian political environment. Nevertheless, violence against women in this environment represents a challenge that recurs in its political trajectory (Arnaud, 2023). Gender political violence can be defined as: "[...] any act whose objective is to exclude women from political space, to prevent or restrict their access or inducirlas to make decisions contrary to their will" (Brasil, [n.d.]). This structural phenomenon is manifested in various ways —physical, sexual, psychological, moral, economic or symbolic—, with the aim of minimizing the annulment of exercise and enjoyment of political rights, being exercised specifically on the basis of gender (Bertolin; Alves, 2023). As a result, women find themselves relegated to an environment where they cannot freely express their thoughts and proposals due to the incredulity, disinterest and moral harassment they face (Carvalho; Yasuda, 2017).

It is important to note that this type of violence is also found in the virtual sphere, through attacks on their profiles, the diffusion of "fake news" and the use of "deepfakes" (Brasil, [n.d.]). According to Ferreira (2021), digital environments have been used as intimidation tools, through the propagation of non-physical forms of violence and including the stimulus of physical violence against women, generating new obstacles to their political participation. Disinformation has become a crucial tool to influence electoral results, representing a form of political violence that undermines the exercise of political rights of both candidates, and compromises the integrity of the democratic process (Bertolin; Alves, 2023).

The use of social networks to disseminate gender disinformation and hate speech against women has been consolidated as one of the most effective mechanisms to erode democratic institutions, fragment social groups, influence foreign contexts and promote the growth of transnational movements of extreme derecha. The attacks directed against female leaders have a significant impact, reaching millions of people with a low cost (#Shepersisted, 2024). In the 2020 municipal elections in Brazil, 98.5% of female candidates reported having faced some type of political violence, with virtual violence being the most recurrent, with 80% of attacks suffered by these women (Marielle Franco Institute, 2021).

Sabbatini et al. (2023) highlight the number of women who are victims of this violence: Manuela D'Ávila and Joice Hasselmann. Manuela D'Ávila reported, in an Instagram publication, that she was a victim of an aggression in 2014 due to a fake news. It was also clear that the constant attacks against her and her family were one of the reasons that led her to interrupt her parliamentary career. For her part, Joice Hasselmann revealed that she was a constant white of personal attacks, which extended even to her children. I informed that his 11-year-old son received photographic montajes en cuerpos hipersexualizados, in addition to death amenazas directed to his family. These cases illustrate how gender political violence in the virtual environment can affect female political participation, highlighting the importance of conceptualizing and addressing the mechanisms that perpetuate this problem.

## **SOCIAL NETWORKS, ALGORITHMS AND DISINFORMATION: DEMORALIZING TOOLS**

It is essential to rescue some key concepts related to social networks and algorithms present on these platforms, with the objective of deepening their influence on electoral contexts. Los "algoritmos" que operan en dichas plataformas son productos de la inteligencia artificial y tienen la capacidad de apropiarse de datos de los usuarios para fines específicos (Leal; Filho, 2020). El comercio de estos datos con fines predictivos se realiza mediante la captura del excedente comportamental generado por las interacciones de los usuarios. In this sense, Zuboff (2021) introduces the concept of "surveillance capitalism", a new economic order based on the possession of human experience as raw material. This model seeks to carry out commercial practices and encubiertas of extraction, prediction and sales, using behavioral data to predict, encourage, persuade and shape decisions, all of which is oriented to obtain profitable results. La competencia entre empresas ha intensificado esta dinámica, permitiendo un reconocimiento e influencia en el comportamiento a gran escala a través de procesos automatizados.

In this framework, instrumentalism is employed, which aims to shape individual thinking through the use of rhetoric, euphemisms and discrete actions, with the aim of integrating the digital media into the subjects and increasing social domination. This strategy reduces the human experience to something observable and medible, ignoring its deeper meanings (Zuboff, 2021). In this context, modern colonialism is presented as a central element of modernity, composed of three interrelated forms of domination:



capitalism, colonialism and patriarchy. These inseparable power structures form a system of global domination that varies the region and the historical period (Santos, 2022).

It is important to highlight a new form of colonization based on digital technology, known as digital colonialism. Similar to classical colonialism in its technical structure, digital colonialism is rooted in the technological ecosystem with profit purposes. Este concepto, definido como el uso de tecnologías digitales para la dominación política, econômica y social de otras naciones o territorios, permite que el colonialismo de datos capture personal information a una escala global sin precedents. The large technological companies develop capital-oriented environments, convirtiendo nuestras vidas en fuentes de ganancias a través de la recopilación y comercialización de datos. This configures a new dynamic of exploitation, appropriation and unequal (Avelino, 2021).

The role of artificial intelligence in this context is especially relevant, since its ability to adapt to individual preferences allows an effective exploitation of human interests, overcoming traditional methods of advertising. La recopilación de datos de los usuarios en plataformas digitales resulta en una distorsión de la percepción de la realidad (Kissinger; Schmidt; Huttenlocher, 2021). Fake news, powered by the advancement of AI, transforms disinformation operations, more extensive and diverse opportunities. As a result, social networks have become a crucial space for the diffusion of false and manipulated information, amplified by these technologies (Landon-Murray, 2019).

According to Krenak, Silvestre y Santos (2021), many contemporary politicians using digital platforms based on the logic of posverdad and "alternative echoes". Once elected, these representatives have to adopt anti-democratic behavior. With the capacities of surveillance capitalism, effective controls of population are possible, promoting intimidating, anti-democratic, racist and sexist ideologies. These technologies "based on data on the soil reproducen, but that amplify discrimination that we seek to overcome" (Faustino; Lippold, 2023, p. 18). Therefore, disinformation has emerged as a new communicational actor, capable of influencing public opinion on political issues, elections, referendums and national crises. It has become a "primary instrument" for groups that seek to attract digital traffic, influence debates, demobilize opponents and create false political support (Ruediger, 2019).

Disinformation is defined as the diffusion of false or manipulated content with the intention of affecting the public sphere (Soares, 2019). It includes various forms of false, inaccurate or misleading information, presented and promoted with the aim of profiting from

the public debate. Esta forma de manipulación adopta métodos sofisticados, usando bots y trolls que son esenciales para las campañas de desinformación en las plataformas digitales. Currently, disinformation has been consolidated as a political strategy whose objective is to alter public opinion, discredit and delegitimize opponents (Barrientos-Báez; Otero; Renó, 2024). This phenomenon is specifically designed to generate effects that attack the fundamental premises that support collective political decision-making (Freelon; Wells, 2020).

According to Ruediger and Grassi (2020), frequent contact with content that promueven misinformation and engaño en entornos digitales puede tener consecuencias perjudiciales para los regímenes democráticos. Conspiracy, fraudulent and disinformative content generates high rates of online interactions, feeding the economy of "likes" in various electoral contexts. Esto ocurre porque las redes sociales se han convertido en la principal fuente de información para ciertos grupos etarios, creando un entorno propicio para la desinformación. The saving of attention, based on clicks, likes and the attraction of users through applications, viral content and trending themes, there is an ideal scenario for the dissemination of fake news as weapons of war and mass disinformation tools (Faustino; Lippold, 2023). Faced with the capacity of disinformation to affect democracy, especially in the electoral context, there is a need to reflect on how this situation impacts women who aspire to a political career.

## **FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The present study seeks to demonstrate the completeness of female political participation in Brazil, highlighting how the intersection between gender political violence, misinformation and use of social networks shapes the current scenario. The persistent gender inequality in the spheres of power and the political violence directed at women, especially those who belong to vulnerable groups, show an alarming factor that compromises female representation in the soil but also democracy itself. The analyses carried out showed that, despite the achievements obtained in the last decades in terms of citizenship and political rights, women all face significant barriers to their insertion and permanence in leadership positions. Gender-based political violence, exacerbated by the proliferation of fake news and the strategic use of social media, is a crucial obstacle that highlights female participation. Una vez que la manipulación de la información adquiere una greater sofisticación, a través del uso intensivo de bots y trolls, que se han convertido

en elementos fundamentales en campañas de desinformación en el mundo digital. In this context, the creation, treatment and diffusion of manipulated images of political women ultimately aims to discredit them, undermine their credibility and inhibit their participation (Barrientos-Báez; Otero; Renó, 2024).

This is evident in observing the performance of the extreme contemporary right and its presence in social networks, based on two essential components: the exaltation of political violence and the propagation of racial hate speech against minorities. (Krenak; Wild; Santos, 2021). In this context, the concept of surveillance capitalism, as described by Shoshana Zuboff, is pertinent. Las plataformas digitales que operan bajo esta lógica no solo recogen datos sobre los usuarios, sino que también manipulan información para influir en el comportamiento y las opiniones, lo cual afecta directamente la forma en que las mujeres interactúan con la política. This manipulation on the ground amplifies misinformation, but also intensifies gender-based political violence, creating a hostile and discouraging environment for female participation.

Dado que la amplia difusión de los dispositivos móviles conectados y las redes sociales ha resultado en la propagación de información falsa o distorsionada a un público amplio, lo que ha relegado cada vez más el consumo de noticias a los algoritmos de redes sociales, motores de búsqueda y agregadores de contenido. These forms of manipulation have been converted into attack tools against women in the online environment, with the intention of silencing them, evidencing the insertion of these practices in the context of gender political violence, especially directed at women who act in the digital sphere (Barrientos-Báez; Otero; Reno, 2024). Therefore, it is crucial to understand the influence of digital technologies on female participation in Brazilian politics. Women are a frequent victim of structural violence and facing a greater exposure and vulnerability in the digital environment, especially when it comes to disinformation. This reality intensifies the challenges they face, thus compromising their ability to act effectively in leadership and decision-making positions.

In addition, the proliferation of false information and digital manipulations creates a hostile and discouraging environment for female participation, which leads to a persistent underrepresentation. Para que las mujeres puedan no solo ocupar, sino también mantener sus posiciones en el escenario político, se hace fundamental adoptar estrategias que combaten la desinformación y promuevan un espacio digital más seguro y equitativo, Exigiendo una reflexión crítica sobre las políticas de género y la necesidad de ações

concretas que garanticen la equidad en la participación política. Therefore, confronting issues of gender political violence and disinformation is a vital step to create a more egalitarian and inclusive future in Brazilian politics.

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