

Political Violence in Mexico's 2024 Election

III. Gender-Based Political Violence Against Women

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By María Calderón

Introduction

Over the last twenty years, the world has witnessed significant shifts towards greater gender equality in politics, which in turn has had positive implications for democracy and society at large.

[Mexico has witnessed a systematic incorporation of gender perspective, equality, and parity in public life](#), signifying a transformation of women's ability to participate in the country's future. The prime example is the National Electoral Institute (INE) mandate, later ratified by the Electoral Tribunal (TEPJF), for political parties to guarantee gender parity in all upcoming gubernatorial elections of 2024: Chiapas, Guanajuato, Jalisco, Morelos, Puebla, Tabasco, Veracruz, Yucatán, and Mexico City.

Unfortunately, as women's participation in politics rises, an increase in [political violence that explicitly targets women](#) has also occurred. The 2020-2021 electoral process was the most violent against Mexican women.

Mexico's political system is awash with political violence that explicitly targets and affects women, obstructs social justice, and hinders democracy. [The advances in female political participation have been met with resistance](#) as men, territorial interest groups, and political elites seemingly feel threatened by increasing female power and respond with violent actions to uphold the traditional system of politics to deter women's independent participation.

Gender-Based Political Violence Against Women (GBPVAW) encompasses behaviors that specifically target women because of their gender. When female politicians are attacked for their political views alone, this is not a case of GBPVAW but of political disagreement or another type of political violence. Examples include violence targeted at political campaigns or voting rights, restricting registration as a political candidate, digital violence, sexual violence, physical violence (beating, pushing, molestation, kidnapping, murder), as well as economic and psychological violence, such as harassment, verbal abuse, defamation, and threats against female politician's and their families.

GBPVAW's end goal is to pressure, hinder, punish, or deprive women of their right to participate in politics. This type of violence takes on additional significance as a form of gender role enforcement, where the coercer tries to dominate and control women, limit opportunities, and curtail their political rights. This type of violence can affect the whole exercise of politics

and the decision-making of women in political positions. Political violence is not exclusive to female politicians since it can be [directed at candidates, voters, campaign staff, and activists](#) during and after electoral campaigns.

I. Gender-Based Political Violence Against Women (GBPVAW) Framework

Conceptualizing, legislating, and criminalizing GBPVAW in Mexico took years of discussion and more than forty legal reform initiatives since 2012. Finally, in April 2020, the General Law on Women's Access to a Life Free of Violence ([La Ley General de Acceso de las Mujeres a una Vida Libre de Violencia](#)) was approved, offering a clear definition of GBPVAW, its embodiments, and sanctions.

The creation and approval between 2001 and 2019 of several regulations and institutions, such as the National Institute for Women (INMUJERES), the General Law for Equality between Women and Men ([Ley General para la Igualdad entre Mujeres y Hombres](#)), as well as the constitutional shift from gender quotas to gender parity, substantially contributed to strengthening the GBPVAW framework. By 2018, twenty-nine of thirty-two states had legislation regarding GBPVAW. Since 2020, six states have set up GBPVAW attention protocols, and six others have published action guidelines. Two other states have designed a GBPVAW Manual.

Following the legislative trend and thanks to the sociopolitical context, international pressure, and, notably, the women's alliances in Congress, Mexico continues to create and promote legislative instruments that address GBPVAW. Additionally, the signature and ratification of several human rights treaties demonstrate a tremendous commitment and progress towards protecting women from such violence, placing Mexico as one of the top countries in achieving a solid framework.

II. INE's Involvement

Hand in hand with the GBPVAW framework, INE, as the electoral referee, has had substantial involvement in the matter. Since 2020, INE has had a permanent Technical Unit for Gender Equality and Non-Discrimination and [specific equality commissions](#) to articulate and implement activities, strategies, and plans to eradicate all forms of discrimination in the electoral field. INE's efforts included the creation of several mechanisms to address gender-based political violence, from complaint protocols to regulations and [study materials](#).

INE also created a [National Registry of Persons Sanctioned in the Matter of Political Violence against Women on the Grounds of Gender](#). INE intends to make a public list of people sanctioned for GBPVAW. The list will facilitate cooperation between institutions when generating information and consultations before registering candidacies. To date, it has reported 360 sanctions: 10.83% at the federal level, 15.56% at the state level, and 73.61% at the municipal level.

III. Awareness of GBPAW in Politics

The GBPAW framework and tools will not be effective until women in politics know how to use them. To understand why female politicians have suffered GBPAW, understanding the significant differences in how this type of violence operates at the local and federal levels in Mexico is necessary.

Since Mexico is a highly centralized country, GBPAW has been more carefully monitored, studied, and understood at the federal level than at the state level. [Efforts to raise awareness among female politicians about the existence of legal frameworks and resources to confront GBPAW have been mainly concentrated at the national level.](#)

On the other hand, even though the local level presents the most prominent number of cases of GBPAW, the scenario is quite different. Female politicians at the state level have, in general, fewer social, economic, and political resources to confront it. When analyzing state-level GBPAW, the fact that criminal groups' interests are more substantial and homogeneous cannot be overlooked. Authorities tend to be more complicit with GBPAW cases where participation and political capital are conditioned and where party leaders, news, and social media outlets have struck agreements.

Observatoria Todas MX, a grouping of feminist and human rights organizations, stated that 80% of female candidates who had been [victims of political violence in the 2020-2021 electoral process](#) were running for municipal offices, compared to 15% for state-level positions and only 5% for federal office.

Unfortunately, filing a complaint regarding GBPAW, especially on the local level, is usually followed by overt and subtle punishments. [Female politicians who report GBPAW have been victims of a wide range of retaliations](#), including political mobbing, getting blocked in politics, losing capital, and freezing assets. The backlash in Mexico against women in politics has caused institutional revictimization, as female politicians prefer to remain silent, which in turn has raised growing concerns among international NGOs and civil society.

Carla Humphrey, INE's Electoral Counselor and expert in political parties and gender, notes that in the 2024 elections, [Mexico will have the greatest number of female candidates in the country's history](#). Such a shift will present an essential challenge for the electoral authorities, which will have to provide women with the tools to secure violence-free environments.

IV. Registered GBPAW Against the two Female Presidential Candidates

Not surprisingly, acts of GBPAW relating to Mexico's 2024 elections have already been recorded. The 2024 elections will be historic for several reasons, mainly because, for the first time, the two leading presidential candidates are women: the ruling party's candidate, Claudia Sheinbaum (Morena), and the opposition's Xóchitl Gálvez (PAN-PRI-PRD).

In June 2023, then-presidential pre-candidate [Xóchitl Gálvez denounced before the INE the repeated attacks by President Andrés Manuel López Obrador](#) (AMLO) after several mentions in his Morning Conferences and other messages on social media. According to her complaint, she suffered GBVPAW as AMLO referred to her as ["the candidate of \[Carlos\] Salinas, \[Vicente\] Fox, Claudio X. González, and other influence peddlers."](#) (All well-known male figures in Mexican politics). López Obrador also accused Xóchitl of being "inflated" by businessmen and letting different men decide her path and aspirations instead of the citizenry. According to Gálvez, the President is repeating historical standards and patterns that use women for the interests of men. For this reason, Gálvez requested to implement preventive measures and withdraw the recordings of the offensive Morning Conferences.

In July 2023, only one month later, INE's Complaints and Denunciations Commission determined that the complaint was inadmissible and refused to issue preventive measures. The argument was that AMLO's messages were made within the public debate and that his "harsh criticism" did ["not necessarily refer to the complainant for her condition as a woman but for her political activity and aspirations."](#)

However, the case was escalated to the Electoral Tribunal (TEPJF) in August 2023, which unanimously reversed INE's previous decision and ordered it to include a GBVPAW perspective when dictating preventive measures. The Tribunal had determined that López Obrador's statements about Xóchitl Gálvez were intended to convey that her political aspirations were not based on her merits but on the whims of a group of men and that; therefore, [some expressions had constituted GBVPAW.](#)

Despite many warnings from INE about violently referring to Xóchitl Gálvez, López Obrador mocked and questioned the electoral authorities and ignored their resolutions by mentioning Xóchitl again in his Morning Conferences. He even implied that he was the one who suffered political gender-based violence, given the attacks he had received from the opposition and the Electoral Tribunal, questioning if ["...the gender \[is\] nothing more than feminine?"](#) Moreover, AMLO referred to Gálvez in his recent book "!Gracias!" (February 2024) as a "ladino, classist, and racist" person, all highly offensive connotations in Mexico.

Gálvez's claim received support from the opposition parties backing her political campaign: PRI-PAN-PRD. The national presidents of the three parties demanded that AMLO abide by the law and stop the attacks against their colleague Gálvez while assuring that they [".....will not allow political violence against any woman to be normalized"](#). Surprisingly, the opposition parties seem to have forgotten that they also made sexist comments against Claudia Sheinbaum. The PRD leader, Jesús Zambrano, questioned Sheinbaum's autonomy and ability to lead several times, even criticizing her physique while sparking controversy among internet users.

In her response to AMLO's attacks against her opponent, Claudia Sheinbaum denied that the President had engaged in GBVPAW against Xóchitl Gálvez. However, somewhat

contradictorily, she emphasized [the importance of eradicating political violence against women](#) in any area of public life.

Paradoxically, Claudia Sheinbaum is no stranger to GBPVAV. She became the focus of similar criticism when elected Head of Government of Mexico City in 2018. According to data from Google analyzing a combination of key search words, [Sheinbaum has received for years far worse criticism and harsh misogynistic and antisemitic comments on social networks](#). Compared to Xóchitl Gálvez, she is associated [six times more with unfavorable terms](#), where her leadership capacity has been questioned. As of August 2023, both candidates appeared in searches related to words like ["puppet," "ventriloquist's doll," and "regent."](#) Sheinbaum registered 246,351 mentions, while Xóchitl Gálvez registered a figure 6 times lower at 43,180.

Just because the two frontrunners in Mexico's upcoming presidential election are women doesn't mean that GBPVAV is a thing of the past. Instead, [political parties, voters, electoral institutions, and local communities must be attentive to the harsh judgments directed toward the contenders](#) exclusively because of their gender.

V. Mexico's Current Outlook for GBPVAV

Turning to the country's general outlook, from April 14, 2020, to January 15, 2024, the INE has registered a total of 352 gender-based violence complaints¹ and/or reports covering 406 victims. The most frequently reported behaviors are attacks on social media (132), obstruction in the exercise of functions (42), and attacks by the press (37). Most victims are women: 406, of which 94 are federal deputies, followed by 43 candidates for federal deputies; and thirdly, 30 citizens.

[Electoral Counselor Rita Bell acknowledged that there has been an increase in complaints of GBPVAV in recent years](#), primarily when federal elections are held. However, she identifies a downward trend attributed to the implementation of more precise criteria and resolutions from the courts, which have determined that not all complaints are necessarily based on gender.

The INE stressed that despite efforts to tackle GBPVAV, [challenges persist](#). Internal training in political parties, more information for citizens, prevention measures, and further allocation of resources are needed. For some time now, political parties have been requested to change their statutes to incorporate a gender perspective, establish prevention and care mechanisms for victims of GBPVAV, and implement equality measures for their internal processes.

¹ The complaints presented include a total of 712 probable offenders (individuals, legal entities, and political parties), of which 19% are legal entities, political parties, and digital media and 81% are individuals (¾ are men). There is extensive diversity in the positions and tasks held by the accused, among whom are at least 52 electoral advisors, 48 journalists or reporters, 44 public servants, 43 federal deputies, 40 the political party itself, 37 digital media, 31 military officers, 24 candidates for federal deputies, 21 candidates for local deputies, 16 councilors, 126 citizens, 16 political party officials, 12 candidates for governor, 11 municipal presidents, ten governors, nine senators, eight candidates for municipal presidency, and the rest to other various actors.

However, [although most political parties have complied, Movimiento Ciudadano \(MC\) has done so more slowly.](#)

On the other hand, the country has seen recent increases in sexist comments and stereotypes by politicians and civilians online and in public fora that reflect the emblematic violence suffered by women. As a result, INE reaffirmed its commitment to prevent and tackle GBPVAW through a series of actions, such as implementing a [pilot program to provide advice, care, and legal and psychological support to victims of GBPVAW.](#)

The Electoral Tribunal has also been a critical player in the fight against GBPVAW, especially with the publication in September 2023 of the "[Gender-based political violence against women in electoral justice](#)" book, which establishes state-of-the-art standards and compiles all [rulings issued from 2015 to 2022](#) related to gender-based political violence. As a sign of support, several members from the Chamber of Deputies stressed the urgency of raising awareness of the need to complete and complement Mexico's parity democracy. They called for incorporating electoral justice and norms with a gender perspective.

VI. Conclusion

GBPVAW in the 2024 elections presents a significant challenge for the electoral authorities, political parties, and all other participants in the upcoming historic electoral process. Faithful execution of the responsibilities of the INE and the Electoral Tribunal as electoral referees will be crucial to responding to and preventing GBPVAW. Although at the beginning of the electoral pre-campaigns in November 2023, INE called on all political actors to conduct themselves legally, vindicate pluralism, inclusion, and tolerance, and [eradicate all types of violence, especially against women](#), it remains to be seen whether it investigates and punishes reported cases of GBPVAW.





Gender-based political violence against women in Mexico's 2024 election demands urgent attention and action, mainly when found in the middle of a highly hostile electoral process. The integrity of the democratic process is compromised when women face targeted violence for their political engagement, hindering their ability to participate fully in the electoral sphere. This pervasive problem violates the principles of equality and human rights and undermines the democratic ideals Mexico strives to uphold.

As the 2024 election approaches, the framework for monitoring and addressing incidents of GBPVAW is in place, but its application remains to be seen. The GBPVAW outcome of this election will serve as a basis to measure how fair, respectful, and inclusive Mexico's electoral environment is. It will also shape Mexico's future and set a crucial precedent for protecting women's rights and political participation in the years to come.






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