

**FEMALE REPRESENTATION IN THE BRAZILIAN POLITICAL SCENE:  
STEREOTYPES AND PREJUDICES**

**REPRESENTAÇÃO FEMININA NA CENA POLÍTICA BRASILEIRA: ESTEREÓTIPOS  
E PRECONCEITOS**

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ESTEREOTIPOS Y PREJUICIOS**



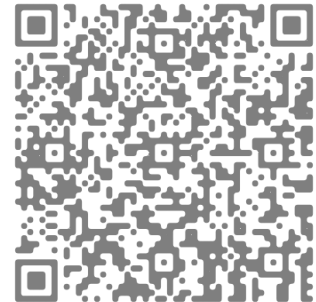
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**How to reference this paper:**

BELISÁRIO, K. M.; REIS, R. C. Female representation in the Brazilian political scene: Stereotypes and prejudices. **Teoria & Pesquisa: Revista de Ciência Política**, São Carlos, v. 32, n. esp. 1, e023011, 2023. e-ISSN: 2236-0107. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31068/tp.v32iesp.1.1049>



| **Submitted:** 10/01/2023  
| **Revisions required:** 22/02/2023  
| **Approved:** 17/04/2023  
| **Published:** 30/06/2023

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**Editor:** Prof. Dr. Simone Diniz  
**Deputy Executive Editor:** Prof. Dr. José Anderson Santos Cruz

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**ABSTRACT:** Almost 100 years after establishing the first Brazilian Electoral Code in 1932, female underrepresentation in politics remains a persistent reality. Data from the Superior Electoral Court (TSE) reveals that, although women represent 53% of the electorate in the 2022 elections, they only secured 18% of the contested positions. This exclusion is even more pronounced among Black women and women of other ethnicities, social classes, and gender identities. Cases of abuse, moral and sexual harassment, physical and virtual assaults, and death threats against women are frequent and constant in the news. This article addresses the various forms of violence women face in politics, focusing on the cases that gained prominence in the media during the first half of 2022. The methodology includes a literature review and documentary research using a snowball approach on journalistic websites. The results reveal that political violence has been frequent and intensified as women's presence in positions of power advances, particularly with the growth of conservatism, which encourages sexist and aggressive attitudes in all spheres of society. Although some progress has been observed, such as enacting legislation that criminalizes political violence against women, it is important to emphasize that its implementation is still limited and faces challenges due to the entrenched misogynistic culture within the judiciary.

**KEYWORDS:** Women in Politics. Female representation. Prejudice. Political Violence of Gender.

**RESUMO:** *Quase 100 anos após a instituição do primeiro Código Eleitoral brasileiro, em 1932, a sub-representação feminina na política ainda é uma realidade persistente. Dados do Tribunal Superior Eleitoral (TSE) revelam que, embora as mulheres representem 53% do eleitorado, nas eleições de 2022 elas conquistaram apenas 18% dos cargos em disputa. Essa exclusão é ainda mais acentuada entre as mulheres negras e de outras etnias, classes sociais e orientações de gênero. Os casos de abuso, assédio moral e sexual, agressões físicas, virtuais e ameaças de morte contra as mulheres são frequentes e constantes nos noticiários. Este artigo aborda as diversas formas de violência enfrentadas pelas mulheres na política, com foco nos casos que ganharam destaque na mídia durante o primeiro semestre de 2022. A metodologia utilizada inclui revisão bibliográfica e pesquisa documental, por meio de uma abordagem de bola de neve em sites jornalísticos. Os resultados revelam que a violência política tem sido uma ocorrência frequente e se intensifica à medida que a presença das mulheres nos espaços de poder avança, principalmente com o crescimento do conservadorismo, incentivando atitudes machistas e agressivas em todas as esferas da sociedade. Embora tenham sido observados alguns avanços, como a promulgação da lei que tipifica a violência política contra a mulher, é importante ressaltar que sua aplicação ainda é limitada e enfrenta desafios devido à cultura machista presente no judiciário.*

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** *Mulheres na Política. Representação Feminina. Preconceitos. Violência Política de Gênero.*

**RESUMEN:** *Casi 100 años después de la institución del primer Código Electoral brasileño, en 1932, la subrepresentación femenina en la política sigue siendo una realidad. Datos del TSE muestran que a pesar de ser el 53% del electorado, en las elecciones de 2022 las mujeres solo obtuvieron 18% de los cargos en disputa. La exclusión es mayor entre las mujeres negras y las mujeres de otras etnias, clases sociales y orientaciones de género. Los casos de maltrato, acoso moral y sexual, agresiones físicas y virtuales y amenazas de muerte en su contra son constantes en las noticias. Este artículo aborda las diversas formas de violencia que sufren las mujeres en la política, centrándose en los casos que llegaron a los medios de comunicación en el primer semestre de 2022. La metodología incluye revisión bibliográfica y una investigación documental en sitios web periodísticos. Los resultados muestran que la violencia ha sido frecuente, y se intensifica a medida que avanza la presencia de la mujer en los espacios de poder y crece el conservadurismo, fomentando actitudes sexistas y más agresivas en todos los ámbitos de la sociedad. También encontramos algunos avances, como la ley que tipifica la violencia política contra la mujer, sin embargo su aplicación aún es tímida y enfrenta la cultura machista presente en el poder judicial.*

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** *Mujeres en la Política. Representación Femenina. Prejuicios. Violencia política de género.*

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## 1. Introduction

The first Electoral Code that allowed female suffrage was provisionally instituted in Brazil on February 24, 1932, establishing that only married women, with the husband's authorization, and widows and single women with their income could vote. Only with the Electoral Code of 1934 was female suffrage fully exercised, although still not mandatory. Although nearly a century has passed since these early legislations, female underrepresentation in politics is still a reality in our country.

Brazil ranks 140th in terms of female political representation among 191 nations, according to data from the United Nations (UN Women, 2020). In Latin America, Brazil is ahead only of Belize and Haiti in this aspect. Despite women's struggles and demands over almost a century, men still dominate national politics in the 21st century. The inequalities are structural, and even with the legal requirement of a 30% quota for female candidates, there are still no effective mechanisms to guarantee this participation.

Women constitute the majority of the population and are also the majority of the Brazilian electorate, representing 53% (82,341,547), according to data from the Superior Electoral Court (TSE). However, female representation is still low. In the 2022 elections, only 18% of the contested positions were occupied by women, while 82% went to men. The situation

is even more unfavorable for Black women and those from other ethnicities, social classes, and gender orientations. Data from UN Women (2020) reveals that Black women make up the largest population group (28%), but they are the least represented in Brazilian politics, according to data from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE).

The patriarchal and sexist culture imposes a daily mark of violence on women in their participation in the political scene. Once elected, they become subject to all kinds of physical and psychological violence, both in physical spaces and in the projection of these spaces in virtual environments. Marielle Franco is a symbol of this struggle and gender hostility. A Black, LGBTQIA+ woman, resident of the Maré favela (RJ), and human rights activist, Marielle was elected as the fifth most-voted councilwoman in Rio de Janeiro in 2016. In March 2018, she was assassinated, along with her driver, Anderson Gomes, for political reasons, and to this day, the mastermind behind the crime has not been identified.

Miguel and Feitosa (2009) observed that executive and parliamentary positions are still perceived as male-dominated spaces, inhibiting female participation. In this sense, Panke (2016) also emphasizes that politics is still considered a predominantly male universe. Albuquerque (2022) cites political scientist Mona Krook, who identifies five types of violence against women in politics: physical, psychological, sexual, economic, and semiotic. The latter, proposed by the author, refers to using derogatory words or images about women in public life.

This article aims to investigate the various forms of violence women face in politics at the municipal, state, and federal levels, focusing on the first semester of 2022 through reports of violence made by them and disseminated in journalistic media. The guiding questions of our research are: why do women continue to be underrepresented in Brazilian politics? What is the cause of prejudice and violence against women in the political scenario of Brazil in an election year (2022)? The methodology employed involves conducting a literature review and documentary research through a snowball approach in news portals and blogs, aiming to identify and analyze cases of violence experienced by women. This approach is based on the principles and theories of feminist studies, seeking to understand the broader context in which such cases occur and their social implications<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> The scientific research intern from the Group of Communication, Culture, and Discourse Studies at Ufes (Grudi), Laura Helena de Paula Valentim Ribeiro, contributed to the data collection for this article.

## 1.1 Political Violence: Definition, Typology, and Aggressors

The project *Observatório de Violência Política Contra a Mulher* (2021) was established to collect data on political and electoral violence directed toward women in Brazil. Federal Deputy Rosângela Gomes (2021) emphasizes that the Observatory produced the "2020-2021 Report on Political Violence Against Women," developed in collaboration with Transparência Eleitoral Brasil, the Research Group in Electoral Communication PPGCom, the Federal University of Paraná (UFPR), the LeaderA Group of the Electoral Observatory of IDP, and the Ágora Group of the Electoral and Political Law Study Group of the Federal University of Ceará (UFC).

The Observatory is also responsible for creating the Guide on Gender-Based Political Violence, which includes, among other relevant information, a definition of gender-based political violence and categorizes the aggressions that can be committed against women in politics. This publication also provides examples of physical and verbal violence, describes the types of aggressors, and offers guidance on identifying and reporting violence. It serves as an essential guide to prevent discrimination against women who decide to enter politics in Brazil. According to the publication, political violence against women can manifest in various forms:

Manifested through actions or omissions, either directly or through third parties, that aim to cause harm or to suffer to one or multiple women with the purpose of nullifying, preventing, deprecating, or hindering the enjoyment and exercise of their political rights solely because they are women (OBSERVATÓRIO DE VIOLÊNCIA POLÍTICA CONTRA A MULHER, 2021, p. 1, our translation).

The document defines that the aggressions against women in politics can be of both physical nature (sexual and bodily) and non-physical (symbolic, moral, economic, and psychological). Sexual violence includes rape, non-consensual sexual contact, exploitation, and harassment. Bodily violence encompasses physical assault, arbitrary arrests, mistreatment, and murder.

Among the forms of non-physical violence is symbolic violence, which, according to the publication, involves discriminatory language, objectification of women, and exclusion from parliamentary seats, among other practices. Moral violence refers to different forms of defamation, insult, and slander. Economic violence encompasses property damage, denial of access, misappropriation of resources and work instruments, and lack of investment in campaigns. Psychological violence includes intimidation, threats against the victim, family members, close associates, social isolation, and other forms of abuse.

The publication highlights that aggressors can be classified into three categories: a) Institutional, including police, public security forces, armed forces, government institutions, representatives of the three branches of government, public servants, and electoral agents; b) Non-State Political, encompassing candidates, leaders, and members of political parties, paramilitary forces; and c) Social, including media outlets, religious leaders, the community, employers, family members, and voters.

It is also important to mention the definition of political violence against women contained in Ordinary Law No. 14,192/2021, published in the Official Gazette on 08/05/2021:

Art. 3º Political violence against women is considered any action, conduct, or omission aimed at preventing, obstructing, or restricting women's political rights, as well as acts that imply distinction, exclusion, or restriction in the recognition, enjoyment, or exercise of their rights and fundamental political freedoms based on sex (BRASIL, 2021a, our translation).

The Ordinary Law 14,192, enacted in 2021, establishes norms to prevent, repress, and combat political violence against women. The bill was authored by federal deputy Rosângela Gomes of the Partido Republicano do Brasil (PRB), and the law stems from the proposal she presented in 2015. The bill was approved by the Chamber of Deputies on 12/10/2020 and by the Senate on 07/15/2021 and was then sent for presidential sanction. Our main challenge is to publicize, disseminate, propagate, and monitor compliance with this new law (FERREIRA; RODRIGUES; CUNHA, 2021, p. 9).

Brasil (2021b) explains that the new law prohibits party propaganda that deprecates women or discriminates based on color, race, or ethnicity. The aggressor will be punished with imprisonment for one to four years, with the penalty increased by 1/3 if the aggression is committed against a pregnant woman, a woman over 60 years old, or a woman with a disability. The law also mandates changes in the statutes of political parties, which must include measures to prevent, repress, and combat political violence against women. Furthermore, the Electoral Law has been amended, establishing that in proportional elections debates (Legislative positions), a minimum proportion of 30% of women candidates must be respected.

Law No. 14,192/2021 is undoubtedly essential in the country, with many cases of gender-based political violence (GBPV). Another achievement that deserves to be highlighted is the agreement signed between the Superior Electoral Court (TSE) and the Electoral General Prosecutor's Office (PGE) on August 1, 2022, establishing guidelines for the joint action of the two institutions to address gender-based political violence and safeguard political rights (BRASIL, 2022a). That year, the President of the TSE, Minister Edson Fachin, stated that the



agreement's objective was to "implement a new paradigm in Brazilian politics, ensuring equal conditions and opportunities for women" (FACHIN, 2022, our translation).

To harass, humiliate, embarrass, stalk, or threaten female candidates for elective positions and holders of public office are crimes that can be reported through the number 180. The campaign "Ligue 180" (Call 180), promoted by the Chamber of Deputies, has been widely disseminated on social media and is supported by the Superior Electoral Court (TSE), the Federal Public Ministry (MPF), the Federal Senate, and the United Nations Women, among other organizations.

## 2. Chauvinism, patriarchy, and feminist movements

Sexism, patriarchy, gender control, and exclusion are characteristics present in global society since the beginning of civilization, and Brazil is no exception. The country's history is marked by the engagement of leaders and feminist movements, the constant presence of various activist groups, and many battles fought to ensure equitable civil and political participation between genders. Although numerous achievements have already been made, there have also been many cases of violence and setbacks, as observed during the dictatorship period and still witnessed in 2022.

Abreu (2002) pointed out that the right to vote was the leading cause championed by insurgent women during the first wave of feminism. The researcher explains that the term "suffragettes" was used to designate the activists organized by the *Women's Social and Political Union* for the right to vote in England in 1909. Their demands included political participation, the right to divorce, better working conditions, and legal education rights for women. The campaign for women's suffrage was marked by strikes, protests, and demonstrations through the press. Many activists were charged with disturbance and ended up being arrested. According to Alves and Pitanguy (1981), achieving women's suffrage rights was accomplished only in 1928, after six decades of struggle.

In Brazil, women only began to vote during the government of President Getúlio Vargas, who established the Electoral Code in 1932. At that time, the vote of married women was allowed, but only with the husband's authorization, reflecting the patriarchal position of Brazilian society in this first legal document. Moraes (2021) highlights the fundamental, albeit moderate, role of Bertha Lutz, an internationally recognized feminist leader who contributed to other achievements, such as women's access to education, professional careers, and labor rights.

The researcher reports that women could vote and run for office in the 1933 elections. The São Paulo doctor Carlota Queirós was the first and only female federal deputy elected that year. In 1934, women's suffrage was incorporated into the Constitution, guaranteeing Brazilian women the whole exercise of the vote in the country's highest document, although it was not mandatory. Only about 30 years later, in 1965, women's suffrage was equated with men's suffrage and became mandatory.

According to Honório (2020), the second wave of feminism was characterized by the work of Simone de Beauvoir, the critiques of American consumerism and the manipulation of the female stereotype by activist Betty Friedan, as well as the perception of feminist writer and activist Kate Millett regarding the existence of a patriarchal politics of control over female sexuality. The main idea that propelled the movement was that "no biological, psychological, or economic destiny defines the shape that the human female assumes in society; it is the entirety of civilization that elaborates this intermediate product between the male and the castrated that qualifies the feminine" (BEAUVOIR, 1949, p. 9, our translations).

Women, mainly white and elite, could already work, study, and be independent in the 1960s. They were professionals, received salaries, owned property, enjoyed civil and political participation rights, and had achieved the right to divorce and custody of their children. However, Del Re (2009) explains that control over the female body was still in the hands of the state, medical corporations, religious authorities, or the husband and father. It was still necessary to claim control over their bodies. The feminist movement of the 1960s/1970s was contemporary with the counterculture movements and shared with the hippies the struggle for sexual freedom, encouraging the use of birth control pills.

In the national context, Moraes (2021) highlights that the generation of the 1960s lived through a long democratic period marked by industrialization, urbanization, the expansion of the middle class, and traditional family values. The author emphasizes the importance of universities, student politics, and artistic experiments (music festivals, literature, theater, and the New Cinema) in constructing the Brazilian feminist movement in the 1960s/1970s. She documents the armed resistance, arrests, torture, and deaths of feminists, as well as exile during the military dictatorship in the country. Furthermore, she notes that in Brazil, many women became feminists due to European influence, especially from France.

According to Moraes, women's militancy played a crucial role and strengthened during Brazil's re-democratization between 1975 and 1982. According to the researcher, women stirred



the country into democratic struggles and also in various demands for amnesty, policies against inflation, more daycare centers, and, ultimately, to end violence against women.

Faludi (1991) observes that the end of the second wave of feminism and the beginning of the third wave overlap when gender division and gender stereotypes become more noticeable, especially in language and the media. The researcher highlights the bias of the press, and studies confirm that independent, academic, or professional women faced a reduction in their chances of forming a family, experienced a decline in their standard of living, and could even develop psychological and physical problems as a result of a hectic life.

The third wave of feminism stands out for its willingness to encompass a variety of female profiles, considering that women do not form a homogeneous group, and recognizes ethnic diversity, sexual orientations, and differences in social class, age groups, and religions. The term "intersectionality," popularized by Kimberlé Crenshaw, enabled essential intersections for reorganizing the feminist movement. Hooks (2019) draws attention to the social hierarchy that privileged white men first, followed by white women, and finally, some Black men. Black women occupied the last place in the population scale, resulting in social devaluation and the naturalization of the violation of their bodies.

In Brazil, "Brazilian republican institutions were forged in patriarchy and racism, structural components of our history that remain as indelible forms of our time" (SANTANA, 2021, p. 281, our translation). In this country, women, especially Black women, have permanently been excluded from positions of power. Alzira Soriano and Antonieta de Barros were exceptions and left their names in history. Alzira was the mayor of Lajes, Rio Grande do Norte, in 1928. Antonieta was a substitute and assumed a seat in the Legislative Assembly of Santa Catarina in 1935 after the candidate withdrew from taking office.

Researcher Judith Butler draws attention to the restrictions imposed on gender models:

[...] constituted within the terms of a hegemonic cultural discourse based on binary structures that have emerged, such as discourses of rational universality. The limits are therefore constructed on what these discourses consider an imagined domain of gender" (BUTLER, 1990, p. 9, our translation).

Santana (2021) highlights that in Brazil, "the feminist, Black, human rights, and LGBTQIA+ movements have already opened cracks in the walls of politics and made the mandates of Marielle Franco, Áurea Carolina, Erica Malunguinho, and Leci Brandão flourish" (SANTANA, 2021, p. 292). However, traces of exclusion and racism remain in Brazilian society and politics. The most emblematic case is the assassination of Councilwoman Marielle

Franco in Rio de Janeiro, which has not yet been solved, and the responsible parties have not been identified.

With the advent of the internet, feminist activism gained global visibility, giving rise to the so-called fourth wave of feminism. Campaigns and protests gained strength on social media through hashtags such as *#meuprimeiroassedio* (*#myfirstharassment*) and *#meuamigosecreto* (*#mysecretfriend*) in Brazil, and the most well-known and globalized movement, *#metoo*. Information technology brought notoriety to cases of violence against women, engaging feminists and supporters of the cause. The sharing of personal experiences enabled the perception of patriarchal and misogynistic behaviors. Topics such as rape culture, harassment, and femicide began to be discussed in chats, forums, blogs, Twitter, Facebook, and other social media platforms.

### **3. Political Representation of Women and Gender-Based Violence in Brazil**

Brazil's position in the ranking of female political representation, occupying 140th place out of 191 nations, as assigned by the UN in 2020, does not allow us to speak of female political representation but rather of underrepresentation. The Handbook on Gender Political Violence (BRAZIL, 2021) indicates that only nine out of 26 Brazilian state capitals have been governed by women since 1985. So far, we have had only one female President in Brazil, elected in 2010: Dilma Rousseff. She was reelected in 2014 but was impeached in August 2016. In her farewell speech, she stated, "The coup is against the people and the nation. The coup is misogynistic. The coup is homophobic. The coup is racist. It is the imposition of a culture of intolerance, prejudice, and violence" (ROUSSEFF, 2016, our translation).

In 2020, there were 56 female candidates for mayor of the Brazilian state capitals, with only one being elected in Palmas, the capital of the state of Tocantins. Women were elected to 12.2% of mayoral positions, while men occupied 84.6%. In the 2022 elections, for the first time, four female candidates ran for the Presidency of Brazil: Simone Tebet from the Brazilian Movimento Democrático Brasileiro (MDB); Soraya Thronicke from União Brasil (Union); Sofia Manzano from the Partido Comunista Brasileiro (PCB); and Vera Lúcia da Silva Salgado from the Partido Socialista dos Trabalhadores Unificado (PSTU). However, none of them had a real chance of being elected in an election polarized between Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva from the Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT) on the left-wing side and Jair Bolsonaro from the Partido Liberal (PL), with an ultra-right tendency, polarizing the right-wing side. The election ended

with Lula's victory, who obtained 50.90% of the votes. Out of the 224 candidates for governor in Brazil, only 38 were women, and only two were elected: Raquel Lyra from the Partido da Social Democracia Brasileira (PSDB) in Pernambuco and Fátima Bezerra (PT) in Rio Grande do Norte (BRAZIL, 2022b; 2022c).

The lack of space and financial support, partisan interests, and gender-based violence are the causes of women's low participation in the national political scene. Elected women face various physical and psychological violence, including threats to their lives and families. Political violence aims to intimidate and weaken the determination of women to seek their space of action in positions of power within the state, whether in the Legislative, Executive, or Judicial branches. Even those with more experience and a significant trajectory, such as journalist Manuela d'Ávila from the Partido Comunista do Brasil (PCdoB) in Rio Grande do Sul, chose to withdraw from the electoral race in 2022 due to threats and intimidation. Manuela d'Ávila was a federal deputy from 2007 to 2015, a state deputy from 2015 to 2019, and a candidate for Vice President of the Republic in the 2018 election. In 2022, she claimed to have given up her candidacy for the Senate due to the threats of violence that she and her family were experiencing (RIBEIRO, 2022).

In the context where some women choose to give up or step back, others continue to advance at the forefront, currently benefiting from more favorable conditions for the struggle thanks to legislation promoting female participation established by their predecessors, such as party quotas for female candidates, laws criminalizing political violence, and increased societal awareness regarding the need to promote gender equality in the political participation of diverse minorities, particularly women.

However, on news portals and blogs, cases of political violence are multiplying as the number of women in positions of power, especially in the legislative branch, increases. The minority status of female representatives puts them at greater vulnerability in predominantly male chambers unaccustomed to their presence. These spaces have become arenas of contention and demonstrate that sexism manifests in all forms while simultaneously being confronted by assertive and determined parliamentarians seeking to secure their place.

The power structures of the State often fail to consider the specificities of women or establish protocols that do not accommodate the female universe. An example of this is former deputy Manuela d'Ávila. A photo of her breastfeeding her 11-month-old daughter in the Commission of Constitution and Justice of the Legislative Assembly of Rio Grande do Sul gained prominence in 2016 due to the unusual nature of the situation. When asked about the

impact of that image, which circulated widely on news portals and social media, d'Ávila wrote in a Facebook post:

Politics is male-dominated and sexist. Politics does not have space for women. Politics does not have space for what differentiates us from men. Politics does not have space for the innocence and joy of children. It does not have space for the naturalness with which we balance our work and struggles with our babies (D'ÁVILA, 2016, our translation).

In 2021, at the City Council of Vitória, councilwoman Camila Valadão, who is currently a state deputy for the Partido Socialismo e Liberdade (PSOL), was reprimanded by a former colleague, then-councilman and current federal deputy Gilvan da Federal (PL), for wearing a blouse that had only one long sleeve, leaving the other arm and shoulder exposed, during the session celebrating International Women's Day. Gilvan criticized the attire of the parliamentarian, claiming it was inappropriate. Camila also had to listen to another councilman saying she looked "beautiful... with all due respect to your husband" (BOURGUIGNON, 2021).

Jocular and disrespectful comments, as well as compliments with sexist and misogynistic connotations directed at women in positions of power, are frequent and often fall within the realm of political violence against women or gender-based political violence. Although it is a concept established by law, it is still in the process of development, facing resistance from the macho and patriarchal *ethos* of judgment based on the Legislature's or Judiciary's codes of conduct when it comes to the enforcement of laws. These environments often demonstrate little receptivity when female parliamentarians raise inquiries or allegations before these judgment instances.

One of the most well-known cases of gender-based political violence was perpetrated by former President Jair Bolsonaro when he was still a federal congressman against fellow federal parliamentarian Maria do Rosário from the Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT) in Rio Grande do Sul. In 2014, he stated on the floor of the chamber and reiterated in interviews with the press that Maria do Rosário "did not deserve to be raped" because he considered her "very ugly" and she was not his "type." The issue was brought before the Chamber of Deputies Ethics Committee, marking the first complaint classified as gender-based political violence received by that judgment instance.

The congresswoman also filed lawsuits against the former congressman, which were accepted by the Supreme Federal Court in 2016, resulting in Bolsonaro being charged with

incitement to rape and offense against the honor of the parliamentarian<sup>4</sup>. He was convicted 2019 and ordered to pay compensation of \$4.207,33 (R\$20,114,01) to the congresswoman, who chose to donate the amount to seven women's movement organizations (CALCAGNO, 2019).

According to data provided on the Chamber of Deputies website, between 2001 and 2018, the Ethics Committee received 150 complaints. After consolidating some of them or declaring them ineffective, 147 remained. "Of these cases, 120 were archived, with 58 not even being considered. In this broad but ineffective universe, seven cases were classified as gender-based political violence complaints" (PINHO, 2020, p. 9, our translation). Between 2019 and 2022, according to the research conducted by the authors for this article on the Federal Chamber's Ethics Committee<sup>5</sup> website, 58 complaints were submitted, two of which were related to gender-based violence. Both incidents occurred in 2019 against federal congresswoman Joice Hasselmann when she was still a member of the Partido Liberal (PL) and part of the support base for former President Bolsonaro.

The attacks on Hasselmann came from federal congressman Eduardo Bolsonaro, the son of the former President, and fellow federal congresswoman Carla Zambelli, following internal political disagreements within the party where she served as the caucus leader. Joice Hasselmann was accused of being "uncontrolled" and a "traitor" and was humiliated by being nicknamed Peppa Pig (a reference to the animated character depicting a pig family) in posts published and widely shared on social media by the two parliamentarians. The situation experienced by Hasselmann demonstrates that men adopt sexist and prejudiced discourse, but women also reproduce them, revealing a lack of sisterhood and understanding of the unfavorable circumstances women face in politics.

#### 4. Gender-based violence in 2022: Threats within and outside the Legislature

Gender-based violence has frequently occurred in state and municipal legislative bodies, gaining greater prominence in the news in 2022. Through a snowball sampling technique and keyword research on Google, the authors conducted a survey that identified news portals and blogs reporting incidents of political violence against women in various regions of Brazil, with a particular focus on women holding positions in municipal parliaments. Some cases receive

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<sup>4</sup> Motion No. 36 of 2014, filed jointly by the Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT), Partido Comunista do Brasil (PCdoB), PSOL e Partido Socialista Brasileiro (PSB), against Deputy Jair Bolsonaro.

<sup>5</sup> Available at: <https://www2.camara.leg.br/a-camara/estruturaadm/eticaedecoro/processos.html>. Accessed on: 26 Feb 2023.

extensive coverage in the mainstream media, while others are only reported on regional portals. The following is a chronological account of these cases, organized based on their occurrence dates.

One of the most significant episodes involves former São Paulo state deputy Isa Pena (PSOL), who, on January 29, 2022, received threats of rape and death. An unidentified individual sent emails promising to "strike her skull" with a hammer, rape her, and decapitate her. The deputy lodged a complaint with the Legislative Assembly and the Civil Police, who forwarded the report to the Cybercrime Division for investigation. This was not the first instance in which the legislator had experienced violence. In 2020, she was harassed by her former colleague in the Legislative Assembly, former state deputy Fernando Cury (neither of whom was reelected in 2022), from the Cidadania party, who groped her breasts during an extraordinary session. Pena filed a police report and initiated legal proceedings against her former colleague. In December 2021, the São Paulo State Court unanimously accepted the Public Prosecutor's complaint of sexual harassment against the former deputy, making Cury a defendant in the case. The Legislative Assembly suspended Cury from his parliamentary position for 180 days, and he was expelled from his party.

On February 2, 2022, during a debate on the implementation of gender quotas in elections, the president of the City Council of Aparecida de Goiânia, André Fortaleza (MDB), ordered the microphone of councilwoman Camila Rosa (PSD), to be turned off, interrupting her speech. This aggressive and disrespectful act by the legislator performed unusually, brought Camila to tears during the session. The councilwoman sought assistance from the Women's Ombudsman of the Regional Electoral Court of Goiás, which analyzed the complaint based on Federal Law No. 14,192. The Civil Police indicted the councilman for political violence against the councilwoman. However, during the Public Prosecutor's statement, the prosecutor requested that the case be dismissed. Days later, on May 16, the electoral judge, Desclieux Ferreira da Silva Júnior, dismissed the investigation, stating that turning off the microphone was in accordance with the daily procedure of the City Council of Aparecida de Goiânia and that the councilwoman's speech was promptly restored.

In the City Council of Vitória, Espírito Santo, former councilwoman Camila Valadão was also the target of offensive remarks by former councilman Gilvan da Federal (PL) during the regular session on March 9. He ordered her to shut up and told her to "keep it quiet" (FLORES, 2022). Camila considered this manifestation even more serious than when, the previous year, her former colleague criticized her for her attire, as the aggression was delivered



from the plenary podium with the microphone on. Such authoritarian behavior can only be interpreted as a manifestation of a sexist culture, seeking to silence and subjugate, especially when a woman finds herself among potential opponents.

On March 15, 2022, another case gained attention in Goiás. During a public hearing with the capital's education secretary, councilwoman Aava Santiago (PSDB) heard a chorus of "shut up" from her fellow council members, Léo José and Clécio Alves. On that occasion, they accused her of trying to resolve, on her own, behind closed doors, the problem of striking teachers. Aava reacted by accusing them of gender-based political violence, as she deemed the accusation unfounded, but she did not formally file a complaint with the police (KETELBEY, 2022).

Also in March 2022, during a debate on an amendment related to the Municipal Women's Council, councilwoman Karla Coser, from the Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT), in the City Council of Vitória-ES, was the target of disparaging words uttered by councilman Gilvan Aguiar, from the Patriotas party. He called her "spoiled" and stated that he would provide "a baby bottle and a pacifier," seeking to discredit and infantilize her (EQUIPE GN, 2022). Camila Valadão and Karla Coser were constant victims of hostility from some council members until the end of 2021. As the only female councilors in a chamber composed of 15 parliamentarians, they took various measures to denounce the aggression they faced, including involving the Public Prosecutor's Office and the ethics committee of the City Council of Vitória. Despite belonging to different parties, they remained strong and supportive. With Camila's departure for the Legislative Assembly, Karla becomes the sole female councilor in Vitória.

In June 2022, the attacks against councilwoman Karla Coser (PT) from Vitória gained prominence once again in news portals when she was attacked by councilors Davi Esmael from the Partido Social Democrático (PSD) and Luiz Emanuel Zouain from the Cidadania Party while delivering a speech in the plenary of the Chamber about the case of an 11-year-old child from Santa Catarina who was a victim of rape and did not obtain judicial authorization for an abortion. The councilors referred to her as "clueless" and "spoiled girl" and questioned her authority to speak on the subject because she was not a mother (REDAÇÃO MARIE CLAIRE, 2022).

Despite some cases of punishment and the increased visibility of women in the National Congress, which could result in more excellent protection and prestige, female deputies still live in fear that the threats made on social media or through emails will materialize. In August 2022, federal deputy Sâmia Bomfim, leader of the Psol party in the Chamber of Deputies,

turned to the police after receiving threats of rape and death. The assailant insulted her via email, calling her a "whore" and a "parasite," and promised to tie her up, rape her, and kill her in front of her son and husband, a federal deputy for the same party. The threats extended to both family members. The deputy stated that she is not intimidated because the detractors of female parliamentarians aim to weaken the presence of women through intimidation and fear.

#### **4.1 Transgender and Black Women: Double or Triple Prejudice**

On June 23, councilwoman Benny Briolly (PSOL), the first transgender councilwoman in Niterói in Rio de Janeiro, became another example of the siege faced by women, particularly transgender women. She received death threats via email from state deputy Rodrigo Amorim of the Partido Trabalhista Brasileiro (PTB), who insulted her using racist and transphobic terms, referring to her in the masculine form and calling her a "nature aberration" and "belzebu"<sup>6</sup>. On June 4, 2022, the Regional Electoral Prosecutor's Office in Rio de Janeiro, a body of the Electoral Public Prosecutor's Office, filed a complaint against the deputy for political gender violence due to the transphobic attacks, making him a defendant. Amorim became known for breaking the street sign plaque in Rio de Janeiro bearing the name of the murdered councilwoman Marielle Franco.

Transgender women play an essential role in the long history of violence against women and the brief but dense history of women in politics. They face prejudice and violence directed at women and the LGBTQIA+ community. Although they have been present in politics since the 1990s, with the election of Katia Tapety in the municipality of Colônia do Piauí, in the state of Piauí, and currently serve in municipal and state legislatures, transgender women have not yet been able to reach the Federal Chamber or the Senate.

Stories of devaluation, prejudice, misogyny, and violence are documented in various municipalities, with one of the most emblematic cases being that of a former state deputy from São Paulo, former councilwoman of the capital city of São Paulo, and current federal deputy, Erika Hilton (PSOL), who has been living under police protection since a man attempted to invade her office in 2021. Erika has already filed lawsuits against over 50 people who threatened her on social media. She is currently the only one with this type of protection, while

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<sup>6</sup> It is a term that refers to a demon or malevolent entity present in various religious traditions, such as Christianity and Judaism. His figure is associated with evil, temptation, and corruption.

most transgender parliamentarians face reports of violence and harassment (HOMEM INVADE GABINETE..., 2021).

In a report by *Folha de S. Paulo* that covered 24 transgender councilwomen, 17 stated that they had experienced some form of violence<sup>7</sup>. Federal deputy Duda Salabert from the Partido Democrático Trabalhista (PDT) reported receiving three death threats in 2021 alone while serving as a councilwoman in Belo Horizonte, the capital of Minas Gerais. In one of the threats, the anonymous criminals also stated that they would kill children at the school where Duda taught, which resulted in her losing her job. During a debate on April 13, 2022, she appealed for the State to guarantee the safety of cisgender and transgender women who run for elective office and hold positions of power (CAIXETA, 2022).

On August 17, 2022, Duda Salabert received a letter with racist, homophobic, and Nazi content, which menacingly stated: "You, Duda, are a danger to society. You need to be isolated (sic) as soon as possible. Preferably in a concentration camp full of trash like you" (PIMENTA, 2022, our translation).

In Duda's case, we observe a triple form of prejudice: being a woman, transgender, and Black. Black women face intense prejudice due to gender and racial bias. This reality is addressed in the dossier developed by the Marielle Franco Institute on gender, racial, and political violence, which presents testimonies from 11 women working in human rights. According to a survey by the same institute, 84,418 Black female candidates ran in the 2020 municipal elections, but only 3,634 were elected, representing only 6% of the seats.

Nonetheless, according to Marques (2021), the 2020 municipal elections saw an increase of nearly 700 seats occupied by Black women in municipal chambers, along with an addition of over 2 million votes from Brazilians belonging to this group. Black women received 32% more votes compared to the 2016 municipal elections, indicating a significant shift not only in the increased representation of Black women in institutional politics but also in the Brazilian population increasingly believing in and supporting the political project of this group for our country. The author also evaluates that the eligibility of Black women was higher in municipalities with up to 50,000 inhabitants, corresponding to 88% of all Brazilian cities (INSTITUTO MARIELLE FRANCO, 2021, p. 83).

It was racism that led councilwoman Elizabete Florêncio (PT) from the Municipal Chamber of Guapé, a city located in Minas Gerais, to report counselor Thiago Sávio Câmara from the Partido Verde (PV) to the Civil Police. The accusation is for racial insult, stemming

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<sup>7</sup> Disponível em: <https://www.violenciapolitica.org/>. Acesso em: 10 jan. 2022.

from the attack suffered by the councilwoman on August 1st, during a council meeting, in which Sávio uttered the following words to the councilwoman: "This little speech from a black woman. Don't you like white people? What is your problem with white people?" (EPTV2, 2022, our translation).

## **5. Final Considerations**

Sâmia, Simone, Duda, Erika, Marielle, Benedita, Dilma, Katia, Carla, Camila, Benny, Maria do Rosário, and many other women who are currently involved in the political area or have passed through it have had the painful experience of encountering and the courage to confront political gender-based violence. Their names appear in police records, threatening letters, emails, aggressive social media posts, and in the records of women's struggles for spaces in politics.

In recent years, incidents of violence have increased in speed and quantity, demonstrating that the political environment in Brazil in 2022 was more toxic and dangerous. In a year where nearly two centuries have passed since the beginning of the fight for women's suffrage, which occurred in the 19th century before the promulgation of the Constitution of 1824 by Dom Pedro I, and almost a century after women gained the right to vote, albeit on an optional basis, in 1934, low female representation in the political sphere continues to be a reality in the country. This situation is evidenced by the constant threats directed at elected councilwomen, deputies, senators, governors, and presidents.

The research results provide clues to our initial question: why do women continue to be underrepresented in Brazilian politics? The analysis of the cases presented here reveals the challenges and risks faced by women who dare to assume political positions. The cases reported in this study are just a sample of the level of violence that women face daily in Brazil. They demonstrate that parallel to the growth of conservative and right-wing movements, more and more women find themselves in situations of significant vulnerability, demanding concrete and immediate actions from civil society and the State.

The other question pertains to the reasons behind prejudice and violence against women in the Brazilian political landscape during an election year (2022). A theoretical review of feminism, gender political representation in Brazil, and violence points to the foundations of Brazilian society, which are notoriously sexist, patriarchal, racist, homophobic, and exclusionary. Unfortunately, we live in a country where, despite women accounting for over

50% of the population, they still require laws to guarantee their voice and space in national political life. Overcoming the current scenario requires a profound cultural and structural change, which can only be achieved through the increased participation of women in politics and all spheres of life, as well as the continuous confrontation of unjust situations that seek to weaken them.

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### *CRediT Author Statement*

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**Acknowledgements:** I want to express my gratitude for the support of researchers Luciana Panke and Mércia Alves in the publication of the article "Female representation in the Brazilian political scene: Stereotypes and prejudices" in the journal *Teoria & Pesquisa: Revista de Ciência Política*.

**Funding:** Not applicable.

**Conflicts of interest:** There are no conflicts of interest.

**Ethical approval:** The work adhered to ethical standards but did not undergo any ethics committee review as it was based solely on a literature review and analysis of blogs and news portals.

**Data and material availability:** The data and materials used in the study are available for access with the provided data and references.

**Authors' contributions:** Katia Belisário (UnB) and Ruth Reis (UFES) are, respectively, the coordinator and vice-coordinator of *Germiné - Study Group on Women Voters' Representation*. In this article, both contributed to the theoretical review and data investigation on gender-based political violence in Brazil.

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**Processing and editing: Editora Ibero-Americana de Educação.**  
Proofreading, formatting, normalization and translation.

