



Report: Unbreakable. Violence Against Women in Venezuelan Politics

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Three out of every four Venezuelan women interviewed for this research stated that their families have been threatened or otherwise affected as a result of their political participation. Every single respondent reported having altered decisions related to her leadership, public visibility, or political engagement in order to protect her loved ones.

This finding encapsulates a broader reality: in Venezuela, participating in politics as a woman means confronting a combination of state persecution, gender-based discrimination, exclusion within political organizations, and deep economic barriers that restrict the exercise of political rights.

This report presents the findings of an exploratory study conducted by Laboratorio de Paz based on in-depth interviews with 23 women affiliated with different Venezuelan political organizations. Although the study is not intended to be statistically representative, the testimonies collected reveal consistent patterns of Violence Against Women in Politics (VAWP), a phenomenon widely documented across Latin America but still insufficiently studied in Venezuela.

The findings show that violence against women in politics cannot be understood merely as the sum of individual acts of aggression. Rather, it constitutes a system of practices designed to limit women's leadership, reduce their influence in decision-making, and increase the personal and family costs of participating in public affairs.

One of the report's main contributions is demonstrating how deeply normalized these forms of violence have become. Many interviewees began their conversations by stating that they had never experienced political violence. However, as they recounted their experiences, they described threats, harassment, intimidation, exclusion from decision-making spaces, comments about their physical appearance, surveillance, self-censorship, and multiple forms of discrimination that they themselves had come to regard as a "normal" part of political life.

Six Key Findings

1. Political participation takes place under permanent conditions of risk. Two out of every three women have stopped attending public events due to fear of the presence of security forces. Every interviewee reported fearing investigation or judicial proceedings because of her political activities. Persecution no longer targets women leaders alone: it also affects their families, transforms their daily lives, and shapes their political decisions.

2. Women's political authority continues to be questioned. One hundred percent of respondents believe that women's personal lives are subjected to greater scrutiny than those of men, while nine out of ten believe they must demonstrate greater merit to gain leadership positions within their political organizations.

3. Being present does not mean participating in decision-making. Although many women hold important positions, nearly nine out of ten believe that strategic decisions remain concentrated in the hands of men, while seven out of ten report that these decisions are made in informal spaces to which they have no access.

4. Gender-based violence continues to be used to delegitimize women's leadership. More than half of the respondents received comments about their bodies or physical appearance; one out of every four experienced sexual remarks or innuendo, and one out of every seven suffered sexual harassment.

5. Economic precarity also undermines democracy. All interviewees identified the lack of financial resources as a barrier to political participation. Eight out of ten cited transportation costs and unpaid time as permanent obstacles, while caregiving responsibilities continue to fall disproportionately on women.

6. Despite everything, women sustain a significant share of democratic resistance. Rather than abandoning politics, most respondents have developed new forms of political participation, supported people detained for political reasons and their families, strengthened networks of solidarity, and, in many cases, continued their activism from exile.

The study also highlights a paradox in the Venezuelan case. The country has a relatively advanced legal framework for the protection of women's rights, including the legal recognition of political violence against women. Yet these guarantees coexist with a continuing process of democratic backsliding, restrictions on civic space, and serious human rights violations that prevent their effective implementation. The existence of laws alone has not guaranteed the safe exercise of women's political rights.

This report seeks to help identify and make visible practices that for years remained hidden or were regarded as a normal part of political life. Recognizing them is the first step toward preventing and eradicating them.

Key Recommendations

The report proposes a set of measures aimed at different stakeholders to advance toward political participation free from violence against women.

To the Venezuelan State

- Ensure independent, prompt, and gender-sensitive investigations into all cases of violence against women in political life.
- Adopt specific public policies to prevent, punish, and provide redress for violence against women in politics, in accordance with Inter-American human rights standards.
- Guarantee an open civic space by eliminating practices of persecution, harassment, and criminalization that undermine the exercise of political rights.

To Political Parties

- Establish internal protocols to prevent, address, and sanction cases of gender-based political violence.
- Promote transparent processes for candidate selection and access to leadership positions.
- Develop permanent training, leadership, and mentoring programs for women, as well as mechanisms that facilitate their effective access to decision-making spaces.

To the International Community

- Incorporate violence against women in politics as a priority component of monitoring the human rights situation in Venezuela.
- Strengthen technical and financial support for organizations documenting these violations and providing assistance to women politicians and women human rights defenders.
- Ensure that international cooperation, election observation, and political dialogue processes mainstream gender equality and the protection of women participating in public life.

The full report can be downloaded from labpaz.org. For interview requests, the study's spokesperson is Lexys Rendón (lexysrendon@gmail.com).