

Landscape Assessment of Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence as an Attack on Women's Public Participation in Guatemala: Incidence, Opportunities, and Recommendations

Transform Digital Spaces (Transform) Activity

Technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) is a global threat to the health, safety, and political and economic wellbeing—not just of those who experience it, but of society as a whole. Transform is a three-year global initiative, which supports the piloting of practical approaches to prevent, mitigate, and respond to TFGBV, with a focus on addressing violence experienced by women in politics and public life. In 2023, Transform worked on a foundational assessment of the state of TFGBV in Guatemala.

This country-based assessment focused on six domains:

1. TFGBV against women in politics and public life, including incidence, trends, perpetrators, and common characteristics
2. Women's political and civic participation
3. Violence against women in politics
4. Women's digital participation and civic tech
5. Opportunities and barriers to accountability
6. Broader contextual factors, including international and conflict factors and LGBTQI+ status in country

TFGBV in Guatemala is a contemporary means of perpetuating misogynistic political violence. TFGBV against women candidates and politicians plagued the 2023 election and post-electoral political unrest saw its extensive use against women government officials and women activists. Impunity for gender-based violence is routine, and the lack of accountability for perpetrators of violence against women in politics and public life, including TFGBV, is part of a broader backlash against accountability and transparency efforts in Guatemala, best illustrated by the closure of Guatemala's UN-backed anti-corruption commission (CICIG) in 2019.

Key Findings:

1. **TFGBV in Guatemala is widespread and often public, but no data are collected or kept on the prevalence of this violence. TFGBV is normalized and draws on stereotypes related to gender, ethnicity, and age.** TFGBV in Guatemala frequently employs coded language not necessarily identified as violating content standards when reviewed by non-Guatemalan content moderators.
2. **Indigenous Guatemalans, human rights activists, and LGBTQI+ individuals are disproportionately targeted with cyberattacks and breaches of privacy.** The impact of targeted attacks has forced prominent women, such as journalists and those involved in high-profile anti-corruption cases, to seek refuge outside of Guatemala.
3. **Legislation is lacking. There are no laws defining or criminalizing TFGBV, and existing laws that could protect individuals do not include provisions for online contexts.** Existing laws against gender-based violence – including laws passed in 2008, 2010, and 2014 – do not support enforcement against online activities.
4. **Guatemala has a higher gender digital divide than in the LAC region generally, but women have also created new digital media platforms in recent years, including in indigenous languages.** Over half the Guatemalan population relies on Wi-Fi enabled smartphones to access the internet. A notable gender gap in the country exists: 83% of men own a mobile device, compared with 73% of women, and 77% of men use mobile internet, compared with 66% of women.
5. **TFGBV against women in politics and public life is created and perpetrated through “Netcenters” with ties to powerful people in the former government, the military, and businesses.** Attacks frequently deploy three common narratives: (1) Speculation about women's sexuality and rumormongering. (2) Women in politics and public life are accused of supporting “Gender Ideology,” a global narrative used to discredit feminism and variance from traditional gender norms. (3) Women are attacked for not conforming to traditional gender norms.



Based on these findings, Transform identified several implications for the design and implementation of initiatives and programs working to address TFGBV in Guatemala. Throughout all these next steps, **trauma-informed approaches and psychosocial support** should be incorporated in all activities related to TFGBV.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHANGE

Mesas de diálogo may provide opportunities to address violence against women in politics and public life, including TFGBV. Participants include representatives from government, civil society, non-governmental organizations, indigenous communities, business groups, academics, and other stakeholders who meet to promote communication between actors with diverse perspectives, with the goal of seeking concerted solutions to problems that affect Guatemalan society.

Recommendations:

- 1. Build capacity and awareness of TFGBV** by conducting a digital campaign in Guatemala and adapting proven methodologies to the local context, supporting the creation of more inclusive spaces and solidarity platforms for women and indigenous people within sectors, and encouraging development and improvement of mechanisms to report TFGBV and related violence.
- 2. Support local organizations and initiatives** by bolstering practices of feminist data collection to fill evidence gaps, working with indigenous-language, feminist, and youth-led media organizations with grants and capacity building, and reaching out to women within LGBTQI+ communities in a manner that is sensitive to the social and legal challenges those individuals face.
- 3. Create tools to recognize the local context of TFGBV in Guatemala** by developing TFGBV lexicons both in Spanish as well as in indigenous languages that will be responsive to the distinct Guatemalan context and needs. Support the development of digital tools and trainings in the Spanish language to combat TFGBV.
- 4. Build networks of collaboration and advocacy** by fostering opportunities for policy makers, CSOs, and educational institutions to work collaboratively wherever possible, supporting partners in engaging government institutions in anti-TFGBV work, and reaching out to the large number of prominent women from Guatemala now in exile.

To request the full assessment, please reach out to info.transform@irex.org

Transform is an Associate Award (AA) carried out under the Civil Society and Media-Strengthened Together and Advancing in New Directions (CSM-STAND) Leader with Associates Award (LWA). It is implemented by the CSM-STAND consortium, with Pact as the holder of the leader award and recipient of the AA, and IREX as implementing lead. CSM-STAND is a five-year, USAID funded award that aims to foster independent civic forces; enhance civic engagement; and build vibrant, resilient, and self-reliant civil society and media sectors that cultivate more pluralistic, democratic societies.