

GENDER VIOLENCE AGAINST JOURNALISTS

Data on gender-based attacks
and cases that victimized women
in Brazil in 2021

ABRAJÍ



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report by the **Brazilian Association of Investigative Journalism (Abraji)** – supported by **UNESCO’s Global Media Defense Fund** – provides an overview of violence against women journalists and gender-based attacks on communicators in Brazil in 2021. The data include records of public attacks against women (both cisgender and transgender), media focused on feminist agendas, and aggressions with sexist, homophobic, transphobic, or misogynistic traits, classified as “gender attacks” and that can victimize men and women (cisgender or transgender) and non-binary people. Regardless of the victim, the main attribute of a gender attack is that the perpetrator relies on sexuality or gender identity to attack their target.

As there is a strong tendency for underreporting of this type of attack, the report is based on a methodology that combines multiple data collection techniques, such as using Google’s news alert system, extracting data from Twitter, analyzing live sessions on YouTube, getting insights from an Abraji’s whistleblower channel, and taking the collaboration of partner organizations. Each case that occurred in 2021 was recorded in a spreadsheet. We organize their characteristics into 43 quantitative variables, including information about the victims, the means of communication and coverage that trigger the attack, information about the aggressor, details about the aggression, episodes that occurred in the digital media, and gender alerts.

Monitoring data indicate that in 2021 there were a total of 119 attacks against women journalists and/or gender attacks involving media professionals. Hence, it means that, on average, **an attack occurred every three days**. A striking aspect is the importance of gender: among the 119 cases, 38% were classified as gender attacks. These records mainly included attacks on the morals and reputation of female journalists (32 cases) and homophobic (8) and transphobic (1) attacks. There were also two cases of physical violence against women journalists and two online attacks motivated by gender-related news coverage.

The appeal to gender and sexuality is not incidental: in societies with conservative values, this type of attack is a way of undermining the credibility of professional journalism and diverting attention from the news content. Instead of discussing the reported facts, the journalist’s legitimacy and authority to investigate and disseminate stories are discussed. In fact, it is no coincidence that the terms most used in insults to professionals refer to gender

aspects – *slut, whore, gossip* – and supposed ideological biases of journalists – *militant, leftist, and communist*, among others.

In 18% of the 119 cases, victims were attacked for their professional background, connections – both personal and professional – or what they represent for Brazilian journalism. There was no specific journalistic coverage connected to the aggression suffered in these situations. In fact, the international literature points out that attacks and abuses against women journalists are an everyday experience for many of them and may not be linked to a particular episode but to their visibility and professional projection (Posetti et al., 2021).

Nevertheless, 60% of recorded attacks were motivated by political coverage, and 52% of identifiable attackers were state actors. Even the coverage on health was crossed by political issues: in 80% of the cases in which “health” was the main topic related to the attack, politics were present as a background – since hostility against journalists and communicators was chiefly inflamed by opponents of social distancing measures and control of the pandemic, anti-vaxxers, and groups that accuse the Brazilian press of conspiring against the administration of Jair Bolsonaro.

The main attackers were, respectively, Jair Bolsonaro, Carlos Jordy, Carlos Bolsonaro, Tercio Arnaud Tomaz, Eduardo Bolsonaro, and Rodrigo Constantino. The intense participation of government actors in attacks on the press and journalists shows recent trends in the so-called autocracies, democracies led by authoritarian rulers. In several places, it has become a common strategy to attack the media and their professionals to prevent them from exercising their supervisory role, undermining one of the fundamental pillars of democratic societies: the right to information and public transparency. For example, on September 7, which is celebrated as Brazil’s Independence Day, President Jair Bolsonaro called for demonstrations of support for his government. Various hostilities, threats, and attacks were directed against journalists at the time.

Research data show that government authorities and officials linked to state powers initiated 69% of episodes of violence with more than one aggressor. In 52% of the cases with multiple aggressors, there was a tendency of linkage between these authorities and networks of Internet trolls. In them, public officials started the attacks and organized or semi-organized networks of users amplified them, reproducing the same content or often the same terms, generating

a stacking effect of abusive messages. Thus, it evidences the use of digital communication platforms and social networks as tools to promote massive attacks and undermine the credibility of professional journalism. Some journalists, such as Daniela Lima, Juliana Dal Piva, Mônica Bergamo, Patricia Campos Mello, Amanda Klein, and Vera Magalhães, suffered several attacks in the same year.

In 68% of the 119 cases, the attacks originated in the digital environment. Most of these cases (93%) were stigmatizing discourses (verbal attacks made publicly intending to defame and discredit the victim), in addition to threats and restrictions on the Internet. The data shows how frequent smear campaigns and orchestrated digital disinformation efforts have become. Tactics range from accusations of political bias and professional misconduct, attacks on the journalist's character and reputation, and attacks on gender. Among the cases not originated on the Internet, threats and intimidation, stigmatizing discourses, and physical aggression stand out.

In 2021, Brazil went through a scenario of great political turmoil, deepened by the public health crisis brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic. The report's data outlines a curtailment of press freedom. In this scenario, the promoters of disinformation and enemies of transparency and freedom of expression use values and gender norms to silence journalists and critical journalism, creating a hostile and distrustful environment. Far from being a spontaneous product of the dynamics of social networks and their users, violence has its main perpetrators or instigators in state actors. Democracy is compromised in an environment where fact-checking systems are constantly challenged, and fact-checkers are attacked and harassed. The destruction of credibility affects both the journalist and the outlet to which they are linked, requiring strong responses from journalistic organizations, justice, and legislators.

We highly recommended that:

- Journalistic organizations protect their professionals, creating secure channels for reporting attacks and providing legal assistance to build an organizational culture to combat such violence;
- Therefore, organizations need to offer training in digital security, invest in team-building and adopt technological tools for monitoring and;
- It is necessary to demand that digital platforms make more investments in content moderation, investing chiefly in employees with training in gender equality and human rights;
- In addition, they must define more effective policies and procedures to detect and penalize repeat offenders and prevent the same offenders from assuming new online identities after being suspended on platforms;
- Lawmakers must be aware of this issue and bring up civil society legislative proposals and ways to reduce violence on digital platforms;
- State agents must update and improve protection policies for journalists and communicators from the intersectional perspective and the specifics of gender violence.

119 ATTACKS ON WOMEN JOURNALISTS OR GENDER ATTACKS



38%

of cases had gender-biased attacks



32

attacks were directed at the morals and reputation of a female journalist



8

attacks targeted men and were homophobia-based



60%

of cases were related to political coverage



52%

of aggressions with identifiable actors came from state agents



69%

of cases with more than one perpetrator were initiated by state actors



75%

of aggressions were stigmatizing discourses



59%

of stigmatizing discourses came from officials and prominent figures



95%

of identifiable abusers are male



68%

of aggressions started in the digital environment

IN 2021, EVERY 3 DAYS THERE WAS 1 ATTACK ON AVERAGE AGAINST WOMEN JOURNALISTS AND/OR A GENDER ATTACK.

THE MAIN ATTRIBUTE OF A GENDER ATTACK IS THE FACT THAT THE PERPETRATOR RELIES ON THE VICTIM'S GENDER OR SEXUALITY TO ATTACK THEM.

INTRODUCTION

Since 2013, the **Brazilian Association of Investigative Journalism (Abraji)** has been monitoring attacks on journalists in Brazil, and in 2019 it joined the Latin American network **Voces del Sur**, carrying out this monitoring according to a shared regional methodology adopted by 13 countries. Annual monitoring has revealed the difficulties of being a communication professional in Brazil, describing a scenario of aggression, stigmatizing discourses, lawsuits, and attempts to limit freedom of expression on the Internet. Data show that attacks against the press and journalists have grown in recent years. The context of the pandemic, disinformation, and constant attacks by governments against journalistic credibility created a hostile environment for journalists in the country.

The comparison between 2020 and 2021 reveals a 23.4% growth in alerts of press freedom violations, which had already been glimpsed since the beginning of the year¹. However, these statistics still leave in the shadows a fact that has drawn increasing attention: the particularities and extraordinary virulence of attacks against women journalists. Domestic and global research indicates that violence against women journalists is growing worldwide and raises multiple causes for this increase (Posetti et al., 2021; Chen et al., 2018; Ramos and Saad, 2018). Attacking the morals of the female journalist has proven to be a common strategy of those who wish to undermine the public's trust in journalism and facts in general.

Accordingly, in 2021, Abraji developed

¹ <https://www.abraji.org.br/noticias/abraji-registra-aumento-de-ataques-a-jornalistas-no-primeiro-trimestre-de-2021>



specific monitoring of cases of gender violence against journalists, including attacks against women professionals or outlets with a feminist bias. That is, in addition to the attacks that victimized communicators, situations in which sexuality, gender, or sexual orientation become fuel for attacking media professionals in general, also targeting cisgender men, transgender and non-binary people, and others are on the radar. Several journalists reported being attacked via direct messages, instant communicators, or email. Nonetheless, private attacks like these are not within the scope of the research, which deals only with public cases of aggression and violence.

The main objective of this survey is to know the breadth and characteristics of the problem to draw diagnoses and propose responses and incidence actions. The result is the project **Gender violence against journalists**, supported by the **UNESCO - United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization**, whose methodology and results can be seen on the following pages.

METHODOLOGY

GENDER UNDER QUESTIONING

In 2021, the project **Gender violence against journalists** recorded 119 alerts. This number represents **an average of one attack every three days**. In addition to attacks directed at cisgender and transgender women and the media focused on feminist agendas, attacks with sexist or misogynistic characteristics, classified as “gender attacks,” were recorded. To develop this indicator, definitions from the academic literature were used (Chen et al., 2018; Edström, 2016; Posetti et al., 2021).

THE MAIN CHARACTERISTIC OF A GENDER ATTACK IS THE FACT THAT PERPETRATORS LEAN ON THE GENDER OR SEXUALITY OF VICTIMS TO ATTACK THEM.

The main attribute of a gender attack is that the perpetrator relies on the victim’s gender or sexuality to attack them. For example, calling a journalist an “idiot” is not considered a gender attack.

However, if the aggression includes derogatory terms such as “little woman” or “slut”, it is understood as a gender-oriented attack. This type of violence can affect both women and men, although it is more commonly directed at women. If someone calls a male journalist “effeminate” or “gay” to insult him, the case is considered a homophobic attack and fits the definition of monitoring

The violence of the gender attack is not expressed exclusively as speech. It can include insults and negative comments and cover acts and practices such as sexual harassment, physical violence, rape, and threats of sexual assault. As journalists expand their presence on the Internet and social media, other types of gender attacks become routine, such as massive online attacks and hacking aimed at censoring journalistic coverage related to gender, as well as new strategies to demoralize and discredit journalists in virtual environments: the unauthorized

dissemination or manipulation of personal images, massive attacks on social networks and offensives against the reputation or morals of the woman, which include insinuations about extramarital affairs, sexual orientation, or exchange of sexual favors for information, among others.

In the present monitoring, a gender attack was defined based on some indicators: harassment and sexual violence, the threat of rape, dissemination or manipulation of images, attack on reputation and morals, in addition to other situations that may include physical violence and different forms of embarrassment or censure. Cases of homophobia, transphobia, or any other forms of discrimination directed to sexual orientation and gender identity were included in the definition.

TYPES OF GENDER ALERT BASED ON NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL LITERATURE

- * SEXUAL HARASSMENT
(unwanted sexual advances)
- * ATTACK ON A WOMAN'S REPUTATION AND MORALS
(narratives about infidelity, sexual orientation, insinuations about exchanging sexual favors etc.)
- * RAPE THREAT
- * DISSEMINATION OR MANIPULATION OF IMAGES
(deepfake porn videos, abusive memes, altered images)
- * SEXUAL VIOLENCE
- * HOMOPHOBIC ATTACK
- * ONLINE ATTACK MOTIVATED BY GENDER-RELATED JOURNALISTIC COVERAGE
- * PHYSICAL VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN
- * DEROGATORY GENDER-RELATED TERMS
(use of terms that stereotype someone based on attributes of gender, appearance, or sexuality)
- * TRANSPHOBIC ATTACK

DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUES

One of the main challenges for recording attacks against journalists is underreporting, caused by the stigma that sometimes follows one denouncing aggression. When the attack is directed at women or has elements of a gender attack, the challenges are even more significant. Surveys of female journalists show that most do not bring these incidents to the attention of their bosses or the police and rarely seek legal action (Posetti, 2021; Waisbord, 2020). This is often related to a culture of silence in news organizations, the lack of protocols, legislation, and structure to deal with cases, and, in some cases, the idea that the best way to deal with an attack is to ignore it. In global surveys, there were also several episodes in which employers asked the professionals what they had done to provoke the attacks. All these facts can dissuade the journalist from making the violence experienced public.

Due to this challenge, monitoring combined different techniques for collecting the cases to get as close as possible to the actual situation of attacks on journalists. Even so, it is recognized that the methodology used is not capable of recording all incidents that occurred in the country and that the data presented here refer to only a share of the total number of cases, with a high probability of having more gender attacks and against female journalists than it was possible to record.



Google Alert System



Whistleblowing channels and collaboration with other organizations



Twitter monitoring



Content analysis on YouTube

Initially, we analyzed Google alerts about cases of attacks against journalists and received complaints from partner organizations, news outlets, and communication professionals. In a second moment, data collecting from Twitter was performed², locating cases of aggression and attacks on the platform. On YouTube, we

analyzed – with the help of [Google Pinpoint](#), – the transcripts of the weekly live sessions held by President Jair Bolsonaro throughout the year. We made partnerships with civil

² Twitter allows you to use – with some limitations in terms of time and quantity of posts – its API to collect data published on the platform. In this survey, this tool was used to weekly download tweets with potential attacks on journalists and communicators. Collecting was carried out with the package `rtweet`, function `search_tweet`, for the R programming environment and started in the third week of July 2021. The keyword combinations used in the search were: blogger, dumb journalist, boring journalist, lefty journalist, leftist journalist, left journalist, wokejournalist, fake journalist, ugly journalist, horrible journalist, imbecile journalist, crazy journalist, militant journalist, bitch journalist, dirty journalist, slutjournalist, whore journalist, and journazist (all terms in their Portuguese original). All terms and expressions were selected from an exploratory study of online aggression against women journalists.

society organizations focused on gender issues and freedom of expression to share cases and complaints, such as the **Committee for the Protection of Journalists (CPJ)**, **Instituto Patrícia Galvão**, **Instituto Mulheres Jornalistas**, **National Federation of Journalists (Fenaj)**, **Gender and Number**, and **Reporters Without Borders (RSF)**.

In addition, we created a whistleblowing channel on the [project page](#). As a result of these multiple collecting forms, 119 cases were recorded in 2021.

VARIABLES AND INDICATORS

Information about each case was recorded in a spreadsheet to facilitate data analysis and synthesis. Each episode of aggression considered as an alert was taken as the unit of analysis of the survey and, from it, details about the victims, organizations they work for, type of journalistic coverage that gave rise to the attack, aggressors and types of aggression were noted. Specific data on cases that occurred in the digital environment and information related to possible characteristics of a gender attack were archived. In all, the research worked with 43 quantitative variables, divided into 8 blocks.

List of variables

1. General data
2. Summary and links
3. Victim information
4. Information about the media and coverage
5. Information about the perpetrator
6. Aggression information
7. Aggressions in the digital environment
8. Gender alert

As for the victims, in addition to name and role in journalism, the data gathered were aggregated into categories such as gender, color, age group, and sexual orientation. For color, a combination of self-classification and interviewer-classification techniques was adopted. Information on sexual orientation and gender identity was recorded, respecting the self-declaration. In situations where this definition mode was not feasible, data were categorized as “indeterminate.” On the other hand, data on sexual orientation were only recorded to the extent that this information was related to the content of the attack suffered – for example, in the case of a homophobic attack.

As for the perpetrators, it was recorded whether the attack was carried out by an individual or

group, the number of perpetrators, their names, and gender. Then, the following classifications were applied to the authors of the attacks: state, state-related, non-state, groups outside the law, and unidentified. After this screening, the authors of the attacks were classified into another 17 detailed types, which made it possible to identify who they were and their role in society. The worksheet with the research microdata is public and can be accessed [here](#)³.

CLASSIFICATION OF PERPETRATORS

In the information on aggression, other violent situations not explicitly linked to gender – but which victimize female and male journalists – were included in the project’s scope. The monitoring follows the 12 indicators of the annual surveys of the **Voces del Sur** project, which follows the general picture of aggressions against press professionals in 13 Latin American countries. Thus, attacks could involve murder, kidnapping, forced disappearance,

* STATE :

Government officials and officials linked to State powers at local and national levels. It includes state companies.

* STATE RELATED :

Individuals, groups, organizations or agencies that, despite not belonging to the public administration, collaborate with the State in economic, social, political, or even criminal acts.

* NON-STATE :

Protesters, unions, private actors, business-people, private companies, media directors, club leaders, and organized social groups, among others.

* GROUPS OUTSIDE THE LAW :

Organized crime groups, drug trafficking, guerrillas, paramilitaries, militias.

arbitrary detention, torture, attempted murder and attacks (against media outlets and persons), murder of family members, restrictions on access to information, abusive use of state power, physical attacks, equipment destruction, civil and criminal proceedings, restrictions on the Internet, threats, intimidation and cyber threats, and stigmatizing discourse.

During the recording of information about the alerts, we identified that the category of stigmatizing discourse appears as the primary form of aggression. It required a better detailing of how it occurs, resulting in the classification between coordinated attacks, disinformation campaigns, or statements by officials and prominent figures. In addition, it

³ We excluded from this public spreadsheet the variables that would make it possible to identify the victims of the attacks.

is possible that the same episode presents more than one type of aggression and has more than one victim or aggressor. So each attack was recorded in as much detail as possible.

If the primary place of aggression was the digital medium, the platforms used (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, among others) are recorded. We considered the relationship between the attack and different types of restrictions on the Internet; that is, whether strategies were employed that restricted the use of the Internet by the journalist to publish or access information. Examples of restrictions are hacking, illegal communications surveillance, denial of service attacks, etc. Finally, there was a record of the gender characteristics – when present – of the attacks, detailing the elements that allowed them to be characterized.



Detailed aggressors

- State officials
- Public servers
- Members of the Armed Forces
- Members of the law enforcement services
- State-owned enterprises
- Protesters
- Identified private actors
- Entrepreneurs
- Partisan or alternative media outlets
- Union leaders
- Religious leaders
- Organized social groups or social movements
- Organized crime groups, drug trafficking, guerrillas, paramilitaries, and militias
- Trolls and trolls-centers
- Members of the Judiciary
- Unidentified citizens
- Others

- * **MURDER** : Intentional act that causes death as a consequence of journalistic work.
- * **KIDNAPPING** : Illicit seizure or confinement of a victim against their will by people or groups that are not acting supported or authorized by the state.
- * **FORCED DISAPPEARANCES** : Arrests, detentions, or transfers against one's will by government agents, organized groups acting on behalf of the government or with their direct/indirect support, who deny information about their whereabouts or situation.
- * **ARBITRARY DETENTIONS** : There are no legitimate legal grounds that justify the detention or arrest, or it does not comply with legal procedures or is deemed as arbitrary since it is inadequate, unfair, or unnecessary.
- * **TORTURE** : Every act through which someone is deliberately subjected to severe suffering, be it physical or mental, to get information or confession.
- * **AGGRESSIONS AND ATTACKS** : Violent, intimidating or limiting, physical or verbal actions to stop or limit freedom of expression or block journalistic work or access to public information.
- * **STIGMATIZING DISCOURSE** : Verbal attacks made public to vilify and discredit a victim.
- * **RESTRICTION ON ACCESS TO INFORMATION** : Limitation or blockade to publicly relevant information or other events of interest.
- * **CIVIL AND CRIMINAL LAWSUITS** : Private or public actions leading to penalties and even prison.
- * **ABUSE OF STATE POWER** : Actions deliberately planned or implemented by the state that, abusing its power and acting illogically and against international standards, restrict freedom of expression and access to information or censor.
- * **LEGAL FRAMEWORK CONTRARY TO STANDARDS** : Proposal and approval of norms, including decrees, resolutions, and directives, that restrict freedom of expression and/or effectively constitute censorship.
- * **INTERNET RESTRICTIONS** : Curbing the freedom of expression and freedom of the online press by strategies that restrict the use of the Internet to disclose or access information.

MONITORING RESULTS

GENDER ATTACKS

In 2021, we recorded 119 attacks against women journalists and/or gender attacks. It means that, on average, an attack occurred every three days. Among the 119 alerts registered, in 45 some elements explicitly characterize them as gender attacks. They account for 38% of cases.

2021 SAW AN AVERAGE OF 1 ATTACK ON FEMALE JOURNALISTS AND/OR GENDER ATTACK EVERY 3 DAYS.

Most were attacks on women's reputation and morals, including narratives about alleged extramarital affairs and sexuality, among others. Homophobic attacks account for 17% of

gender attacks. Moreover, we recorded two cases of physical violence against journalists, two gender-related online attacks, and a transphobic attack.



38% OF CASES HAD GENDER-BIASED ATTACKS.

In interviews with 75 journalists from five different countries, Chen et al. (2018) recorded that these professionals note that criticism of their work is constantly laden with misogynistic terms or involves threats of sexual violence – a different pattern than attacks against

Gender attacks

Attack on women's reputation and morals	32
Online attack motivated by gender-related coverage	8
Physical violence against women	2
Homophobic attack	2
Transphobic attack	1
Total	45

male journalists. In fact, the verbal assaults classified as gender assaults in the present survey made use of a series of derogatory terms, many of which carried a visible burden of gender assault. This is the case of sexist, misogynistic, and homophobic expressions used to humiliate professionals for their sexuality and appearance. The word cloud below shows that *slut*, *whore*, *ugly*, *old bat*, *bitch*, *fag* and *botter* were among these terms in their Portuguese versions.



In addition, stereotyped personality traits were part of the list of insults directed at female communicators. They were called *crazy*, *liars* and discredited for being *gossipy*. Their cognitive abilities were constantly questioned, as they were often identified as *stupid*, *idiots*, and *imbeciles*. In addition to the offenses of a sexist and mental nature, there are the provocations of an ideological bias. Journalists were accused of being *militants*, *journalists*, *communists*, *leftists* and other similar nicknames. These were even the words that appeared the most in the attacks – which is a product and indicative of an inflamed political scenario, marked by polarization.

A comparative study conducted by Abraji focused on online aggression against journalists in 2020 revealed the chasm between the treatment of women and men, even in cases of violence. Of the 723 tweets with attacks analyzed, 261 contained explicit gender-related aggression – using appearance, sexuality, sexual orientation, or stereotypical personality traits as instruments of offense. Of these, 94.2% were aimed at female professionals, while only 5.8% victimized male journalists.

The 2021 scenario, represented by the word cloud, gets close to what happened with the 2020 episodes: *crazy, ugly, whore, stupid, leftist, and militant* were expressions commonly used to humiliate and discredit journalists. It is essential to point out that the attacks studied on Twitter had the participation of political agents with national projection, such as Eduardo Bolsonaro e city council Carlos Bolsonaro – showing the mobilizing potential of these actors.

As examples of the gender violence suffered by journalists in 2021, there are the different attacks aimed at Patricia Campos Mello, from Folha de S.Paulo, the target of three attacks



with gender characteristics, all related to the same episode. In 2018, Campos Mello published a story about how bulk messages were sent through WhatsApp, financed by Brazilian businessmen, contributed to Jair Bolsonaro's campaign during that year's presidential elections. The story generated debates on the political scene. In February 2020, it opened a new chapter: a former employee of Yacows mass shooting company stated, in testimony to the Fake News Joint Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry (CPMI), that the journalist had insinuated herself sexually to obtain the disclosed information.

Although Yacows' former employee was ordered by the São Paulo Court to indemnify Campos Mello for moral damages, the lie triggered a series of attacks against the journalist, especially on social media. Internet users and political actors such as federal representative Eduardo Bolsonaro began to pervert the journalistic jargon "to give a scoop" – understood as the act of overcoming the competition in the race to disclose unprecedented news – giving it a highly offensive sexual charge. As a result, Campos Mello was identified as the "journalist who gives the scoop" (or "the hole" in its Brazilian term) in online attacks identified in February, September, and October 2021. Similar episodes appeared on the Internet throughout 2020.



Aggressions against women journalists were not restricted to digital spaces. In September 2021, a journalist from the Globo group⁴ was stoned while covering the Brazilian soccer team in Recife, capital of the state of Pernambuco, Northeast of Brazil. On that day, fans waiting for the athletes in front of a hotel attacked at least five media professionals. In addition to physical violence, the reporter – the only woman involved in the episode – suffered from offenses related to her gender: she was called a whore by the aggressors.

Another facet of gender violence against Brazilian communicators involved homophobic and transphobic attacks. In August⁵, a reporter from the state of Alagoas was a victim of doxing,⁶ legal threats, and hostile and homophobic comments on his Twitter and Instagram profiles. After publishing a report showing how a physician and digital influencer discouraged vaccination against Covid-19 on his social media accounts, the professional became a target. Among the various insults he received, the journalist was called *botter*, *wimp*, *leftist*, and *militant*.

Three months later, in November, a professional from a city in mainland Bahia⁷ suffered a transphobic attack from an employee of her city's city hall. For her coverage and political comments, the journalist was threatened, harassed, insulted, and had her gender identity questioned. In addition to putting her physical integrity at risk, the attacks hurt the communicator's reputation and morals. As already mentioned, attacks of this type were the

⁴ Available at <https://abraji.org.br/noticias/jornalistas-sao-apedrejados-em-cobertura-da-selecao-no-recife>

⁵ Available at <https://www.abraji.org.br/noticias/abraji-registrou-137-ameacas-contrajornalistas-vazamento-de-dados-e-outros-ataques-na-internet>

⁶ The term “doxing” describes the action of disclosing a victim's personal information online.

⁷ Available at <https://www.abraji.org.br/noticias/jornalista-trans-no-interior-da-bahia-sofre-perseguiçãode-funcionário-da-prefeitura>

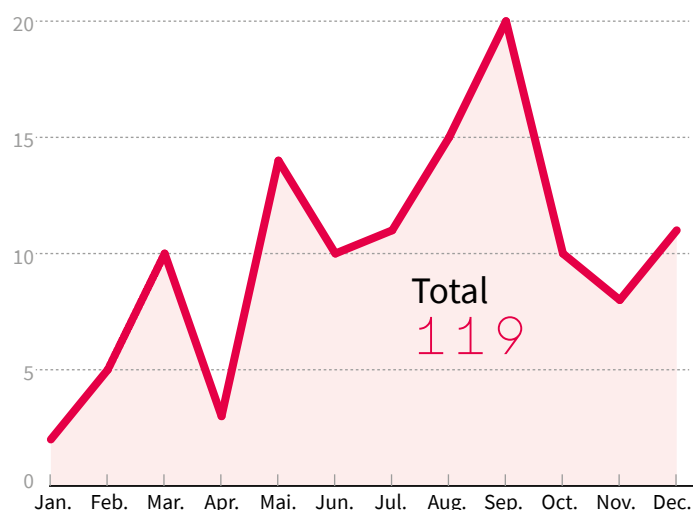
most common among episodes with gender violence.

The compiled cases show a scenario of violations and abuses against women journalists and gender attacks. The objective is not to affirm that attacks victimizing male journalists are less severe but to demonstrate that there are specificities to be considered when it comes to gender violence. This type of aggression is usually characterized – among other factors – by its highly personal aspect, alluding to presumed characteristics of the victim and advancing into their private sphere. The international literature points out that the effects can range from the self-censorship of women journalists – who become less vocal and avoid specific topics to avoid being attacked – to the loss of credibility and professional, reputational, and property damage. The damage extends to the relationship with the sources and the public, which directly affects the journalist’s working conditions (Posetti et al., 2020). The most general effects are the erosion of freedom of expression and the press, one of the main pillars of democratic societies.

ATTACKS PER MONTH

The month with the most records of attacks was September (20), and the month with the fewest records was January (2). In September, several attacks took place in the context of demonstrations in favor of Jair Bolsonaro, held in different cities on September 7, Brazil’s Independence Day. On that day, four professionals were harassed, threatened, and had equipment destroyed while covering the acts in favor of the president. Days before the event, Tania Morales, a journalist from CBN radio, was the target of stigmatizing discourses by Jair Bolsonaro and supporters, such as businessman Luciano Hang and federal representative Carlos Jordy, for commenting on the possibility of protesters going armed to demonstrations and display violent behavior⁸.

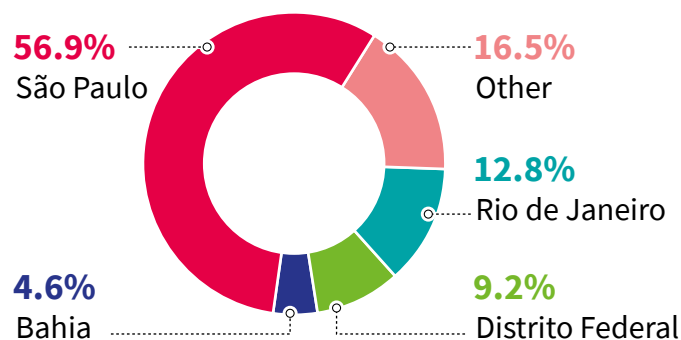
Attacks per month



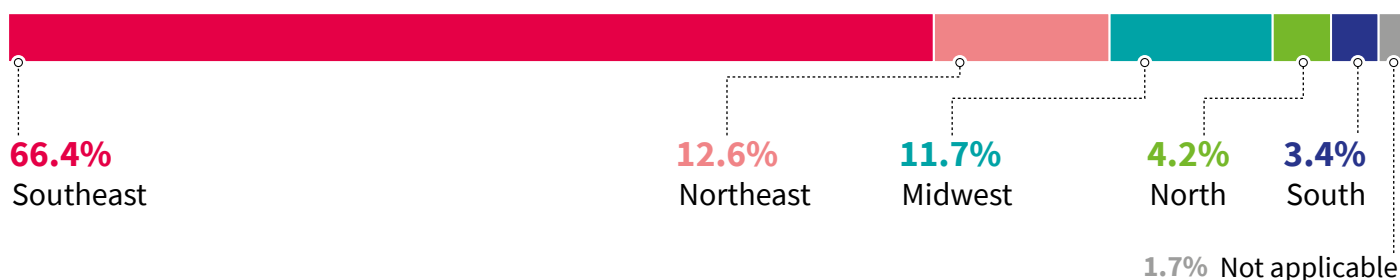
⁸Although the peak of attacks in the second half of 2021 can be explained by political events that moved Brazilian society, the significant difference between the number of cases recorded in the first and second half of the year may be the result of a methodological change. As of July, the data collection technique on Twitter became part of monitoring. A closer analysis of the platform may have been a reason for the increase in episodes cataloged from that period onwards.

FREQUENCY AND REGIONAL DISTRIBUTION **Attacks by state**

The Southeast was the region that concentrated the most attacks, followed by the Northeast and Midwest. Among the states, São Paulo was the one with the most episodes, followed by Rio de Janeiro. The fact that the Southeast concentrates some of the largest communication groups in the country, such as Globo and Folha de S.Paulo, may explain the concentration of attacks in the region. Both were among the organizations whose professionals suffered the most attacks⁹.



Attacks by region



Among the 127 victims, 109 are reporters or analysts of print, audiovisual or digital media, representing 85.7% of the total. Among the other cases, six victims are independent reporters (4.7%), and five are photographers or camera operators (3.9%). In two cases, the aggression was against the media: Portal Catarinas suffered a denial of service attack for coverage related to gender, and Nós, Mulheres da Periferia was hacked for the same reason.

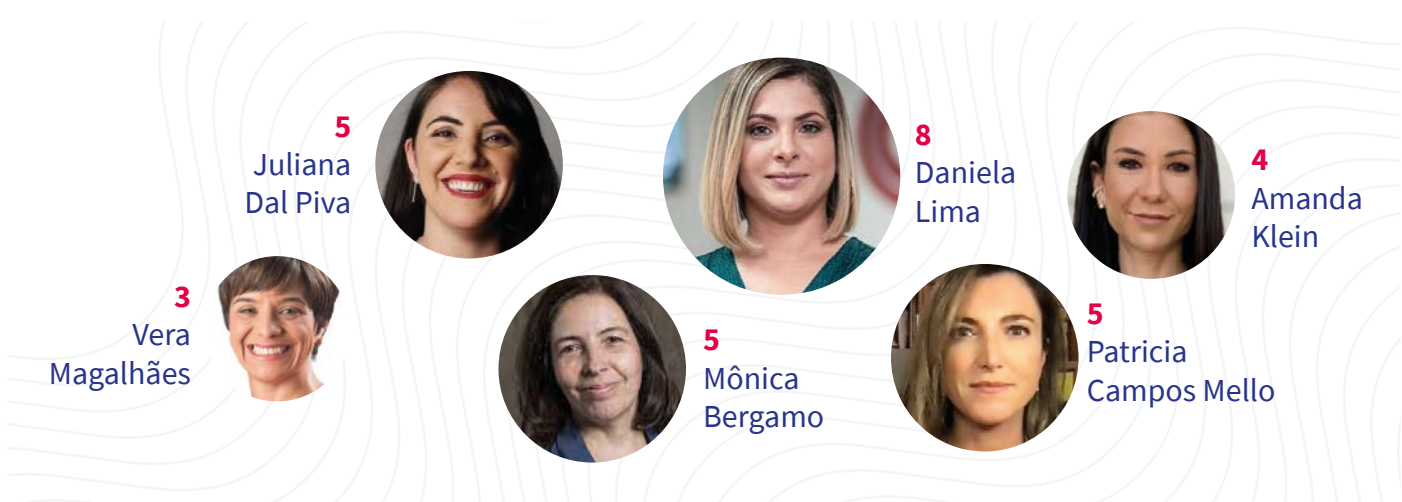
Recording the victims' names made it possible to identify which women suffered the most attacks in 2021. Among them, TV anchor and journalist Daniela Lima stood out. She was targeted in eight different episodes in just one year, related to politics, public security, and the economy and employment. In a single case, Lima was the target of five different aggressors (Carlos Bolsonaro, Carlos Jordy, Sérgio Camargo, Silas Malafaia, and Internet users/trolls). She was attacked on social media (Twitter) for a comment about the police operation that left 28

⁹ It should be noted that the methodology used in the collection and identification of cases may have contributed to the high numbers in this region, since one of the techniques applied was the monitoring of news alerts - focused mainly on prominent journalists, who work in large news companies and, usually, are located along Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. We seek to mitigate this problem by creating the whistleblower channel and asking for the collaboration of partner organizations. Even so, there may be underreporting of cases outside the Southeast region.



85.7% OF VICTIMS ARE MEDIA REPORTERS OR ANALYSTS

dead in Rio de Janeiro. In a comment made on May 7, she was accused of having allegedly played down the fact that “only” one police officer had died during the operation. Journalists Juliana Dal Piva, Mônica Bergamo, and Patricia Campos Mello suffered five attacks each. Amanda Klein suffered four, and Vera Magalhães, three. These cases of continued attacks fit the pattern identified by some research, which shows that violence against women journalists can range from large-scale attacks and extreme threats to constant and slow attacking, which involves continuous abuse (Posetti, 2021).



VICTIMS PROFILE

Among the victims, 91.3% are female, and one of them is a transgender woman. In the other cases (7.1%), they were men, and all were the target of homophobic attacks. Finally, in two episodes, the victims were media outlets that reported on issues related to gender and



91.3% WOMEN



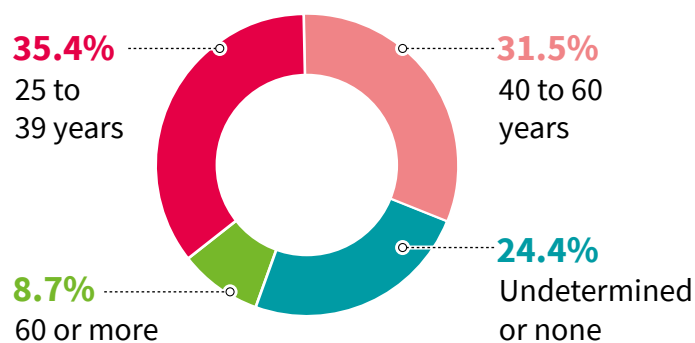
83% WHITE

feminism. As for color, 83% were identified as White, 9% as Black, 7% undetermined, and in 1% of the cases, this categorization was not applied (because it is, for example, an outlet). The underrepresentation of Black and Brown victims may result from racial inequalities in the journalistic field, as data collection favored the recording of cases in which victims are usually professionals with high visibility and, often, at the top of their careers.

ATTACKS ON PEOPLE CONNECTED TO THE VICTIM

There were seven cases in which the attacks were not limited to journalists but were directed at family members and colleagues. The findings converge with other research showing that violence against journalists – particularly against women professionals – often puts their sources, colleagues, and family members, including children and babies, at risk (Posetti et al., 2021). In the monitoring of Abraji, threats or exposure of family members and threats or aggressions to colleagues were identified. In the first case, Daniela Lima was the target of attacks and threats on social networks by Internet user José Roberto dos Santos, who threatened her family with death. In the second, journalist Marcelo Hailer received death threats and LGBTphobic insults. His family was threatened on social media after a report on a police operation that killed 25 in the state of Minas Gerais.

Age of victims



Attacks on people connected to the victim

Threats to family members	2
Family exposures	2
Threats to colleagues	2
Aggression towards colleagues	1

VICTIMS' OUTLETS

Monitoring revealed that 24.4% of the victims worked for Grupo Globo, 11% for CNN Brasil, 10.2% for Folha de S.Paulo, 5.5% for UOL, and 3.9% were freelance journalists. This data is an essential signal for these journalistic companies to invest in structure to deal with attacks.

Victims' outlets	N°	%
Grupo Globo	31	24,4
Others	31	24,4
CNN Brasil	14	11
Folha de S. Paulo	13	10,2
UOL	7	5,5
Freelancer	5	3,9
Grupo Globo (local branch)	5	3,9
Jovem Pan	4	3,1
TV Cultura	3	2,4
Aos Fatos	2	1,6
CBN	2	1,6
Estadão	2	1,6
Grupo Record	2	1,6
Grupo Record (local branch)	2	1,6
Metrópolis	2	1,6
SBT	2	1,6
Total	127	100

VICTIMS' TOPICS OF COVERAGE

A total of 58% of victims do not work in a specific editorial department. However, in the 53 cases of victims who do so, 89% of the attacks were directed at journalists working with political stories. When we look at the topic of coverage that motivated the attacks, we see politics once again standing out: 60% of the attacks were triggered by journalistic coverage related to politics. Crime and public safety accounted for 5% of cases, and health for 5%. The latter was linked to journalistic findings of the Covid-19 pandemic. The data converge again with international research, which shows that most related stories to attacks are often linked precisely to politics and elections (Posetti et al., 2021). As Silvio Waisbord points out,

“Globally, investigative reporters exposing corruption and human rights abuses have been frequent targets of intimidation and murder by governments and state-related actors. (Waisbord, 2020: 5)

IN 53 CASES OF VICTIMS WORKING IN A SPECIFIC SECTION, 89% OF THE ATTACKS WERE DIRECTED AT JOURNALISTS IN THE POLITICAL FIELD

Victims' topic	Nº	%	Coverage theme	Nº	%
Not applicable	74	58,2	Politics	71	59,6
Politics	47	37	Not applicable	21	17,6
Sport	2	1,6	Crime and public security	6	5
Local	1	0,8	Health	5	4,2
Culture and entertainment	1	0,8	Sport	4	3,3
Fashion and lifestyle	1	0,8	Society	3	2,5
Opinion	1	0,8	Economy	3	2,5
Total	127	100	Traffic accidents	2	1,7
			Valentine's Day	1	0,9
			Entertainment	1	0,9
			Environment	1	0,9
			Mobility	1	0,9
			Total	1	100

In cases where there is no specific coverage (identified in the table as “not applicable”), victims were attacked “spontaneously” for their professional background, connections (personal or professional) or what they represent for Brazilian journalism. In short, there was no specific coverage, commentary, or demonstration in these episodes that led to the aggression.

In general, health coverage was crossed by political issues. In 80% of the cases where “health” was the main theme related to the attack, the political scenario was present as a backdrop, as hostility against journalists and communicators was chiefly inflamed by opponents of social distancing and other control measures of the pandemic, anti-vaccine people and groups that accuse the Brazilian press of conspiring against the government of Jair Bolsonaro.

PERPETRATORS

The perpetrators of violence against journalists range from individuals to networked groups to disinformation agents linked to the state. In an international study funded by UNESCO,

political actors – including presidents and elected representatives, party officials and party members – were identified in 37% of cases as instigating and promoting campaigns of online violence against female journalists. Anonymous or strangers were indicated as aggressors 57% of the time (Posetti et al., 2021). In the monitoring of Abraji, state actors were the primary agents of violence, participating in 58 of 112 attacks recorded with identifiable perpetrators, representing 52%.



There is a recognizable pattern in cases with more than one aggressor (42). In 69% of them, a state actor initiated the aggression, and non-state agents joined them to attack journalists. Only in 19% did the opposite occur. In 12% of cases with more than one aggressor, two or more state actors joined in the attacks. This pattern arose mainly in situations of Internet violence.

STATE ACTORS WERE THE MAIN PERPETRATORS IN 52% OF CASES WITH IDENTIFIABLE AGGRESSORS.

Among these state actors, the perpetrators of the most aggression were: Jair Bolsonaro and Carlos Jordy, with eight attacks each; Carlos Bolsonaro and Tercio Arnaud Tomaz, with seven; followed by Eduardo Bolsonaro and Rodrigo Constantino, with five each. Almost all of them are linked to the Presidency of the Republic, such as the president himself, advisors, ministers, sons with elective positions, and representatives close to the group.



IN 69% OF CASES WITH MORE THAN ONE AGGRESSOR, STATE ACTORS INITIATED THE AGGRESSION AND NON-STATE ACTORS JOINED THEM.

Authors of most aggressions

President Jair Bolsonaro (PL)	8
Carlos Jordy, federal representative (PSL-RJ)	8
Carlos Bolsonaro, councilor (Republicans-RJ)	7
Tercio Arnaud Tomaz, Bolsonaro's advisor	7
Eduardo Bolsonaro, federal representative (PSL-SP)	5
Rodrigo Constantino, journalist	5
Mario Frias, special Secretary of Culture	3
Sérgio Camargo, president of the Palmares Foundation	3
Bia Kicis, federal representative (PSL-DF)	2
Carla Zambelli, federal representative (PSL-SP)	2
Silas Malafaia, pastor	2

GENDER OF PERPETRATORS

In the survey, 94 attacks came from identifiable individual perpetrators. Among these cases, 95% of the aggressors are male, and 5% are female. This figure does not include attacks with multiple authors, such as groups and institutions, and cases of systematic campaigns involving Internet users.

When the type of aggressor is better detailed, it is noticed that groups of trolls stand out among the total of registered aggressors, followed by state authorities and private actors.

 95% AMONG THE IDENTIFIABLE AGGRESSORS ARE MALE.

In 24 cases, state authorities (President of the Republic, representatives, and senators) initiated attacks that had repercussions thanks to Internet networks, assuming a massive character on social media. It shows, once again, the articulation between such public authorities and groups of aggressors on the Internet. Moreover, these data suggest the existence of organized or semi-organized networks of aggressors, whose objective is to reverberate and amplify online aggression, creating a hostile environment for journalists.

Coordination is suspected, especially when journalists receive many messages in a short period. There is a proliferation of identical or very similar content or simultaneous attempts to invade their social networks, email, or instant communicators (Waisbord, 2020). In addition, studies point to the high probability of using robots in attacks. Research carried out by FGV-DAPP suggests that algorithmic and machine learning strategies are used to disseminate certain content through a combination of bots and human behavior (Ramos and Saad, 2020).



STATE
AUTHORITIES



TROLL
NETWORKS

TYPES OF AGGRESSION

Of the total of 119 attacks, 75% were stigmatizing discourses; 11% were threats, intimidation, and cyber threats; 5% physical attacks; 2.5% were restrictions on the Internet; 2.5% were civil and criminal proceedings; and 2.5% were restrictions on access to information. Stigmatizing discourses are verbal attacks or attacks using images, videos, and audio messages that are made public to defame and discredit the victim.

In 15 cases, the attacks were paired with other forms of attack.

Type of aggressor	N°	%
Trolls, Trolls-centers	61	35,9
State officials	48	28,2
Identified private actors	14	8,2
Unidentified citizens	12	7,1
Public servers	10	5,9
Protesters	10	5,9
Religious leaders	6	3,5
Members of the Judiciary	3	1,7
Law enforcement officers	2	1,2
Partisan or alternative media	2	1,2
Entrepreneurs	1	0,6
Other	1	0,6
Total	170	100

Types of aggression

Stigmatizing discourses	90
Threats, intimidation and cyberthreats	13
Physical aggression	7
Restrictions on the Internet	3
Civil and criminal proceedings	3
Restrictions on access to information	3

Number of cases of aggression

Threats and stigmatizing discourses	7
Physical aggression and destruction of equipment	2
Stigmatizing discourses and restrictions on the Internet	2
Threats and equipment destruction	1
Physical aggression and stigmatizing discourse	1
Threat and physical aggression	1
Stigmatizing discourse and restrictions on the Internet	1
Civil and criminal proceedings and abusive use of state power	1

TYPES OF STIGMATIZING SPEECH

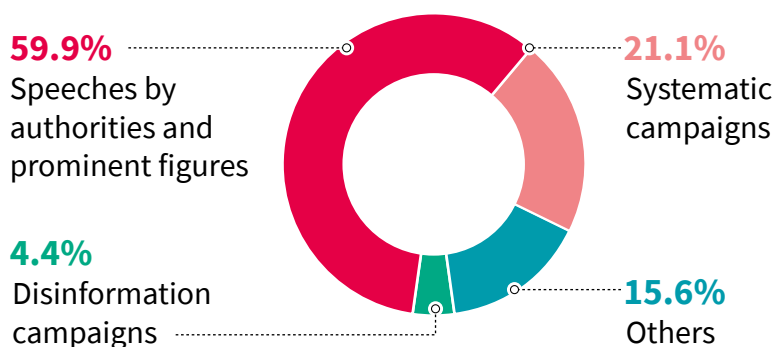
To better understand how stigmatizing discourses work, it is essential to detail this form of aggression. In the present monitoring, stigmatizing discourses were divided into discourses by authorities and prominent figures, disinformation campaigns and systematic campaigns. Official discourses are insults or disqualifications made publicly by public authorities, including on social media. Articulated networks or private actors carry out recurring campaigns intending to discredit the journalist’s work or the professional in general. Lastly, disinformation campaigns are online actions that harm personal reputation (e.g., abusive memes, manipulated images, and fabricated or distorted information).

CASES WITH MORE THAN ONE TYPE OF STIGMATIZING DISCOURSE

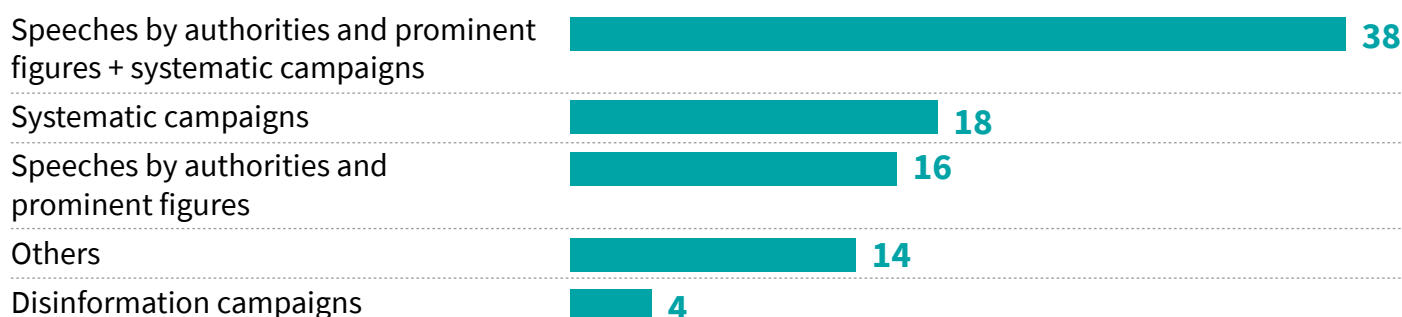
Among the 90 cases of stigmatizing discourses, it was found in 42%

speeches by authorities and prominent figures related to systematic campaigns against journalists. This means that discourses by authorities reverberated on the networks, assuming the form of systematic campaigns.

Types of stigmatizing discourses



Cases with more than one type of stigmatizing discourse

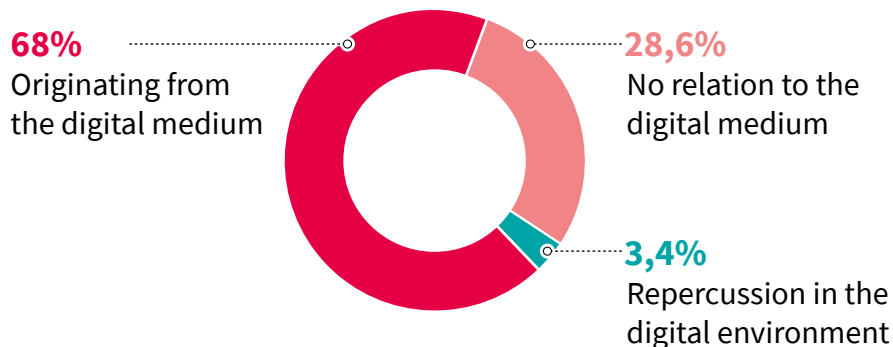


DIGITAL MEDIA

Journalists are increasingly expected to have a virtual presence and create public engagement on their social media accounts (Chen and Pain, 2017 apud Koraila, 2020; Finneman, 2019). Such trends create new challenges, particularly for female professionals, as they are exposed to constant scrutiny and public judgment (Finneman et al., 2019). The perception that violence has increased due to the need to be present on the networks is shared by some journalists,

who complain about erasing borders between their professional and personal lives. Their understanding is that the Internet and social networks have blurred these lines, making them more vulnerable (Posetti et al., 2021).

Digital media



Notably, the Internet has exacerbated the problem of harassment and violence against media professionals (Adams, 2018; Posetti et al., 2021). Even in relatively safe countries for journalists, online misogyny and constant harassment are becoming everyday facts for many communicators, impacting how they work. An international study (Chen et al., 2018) based on 75 in-depth interviews with female journalists from Germany, India, Taiwan, the United Kingdom, and the United States showed that they face increasing harassment in the online environment. It impacts the way they work.

The Covid-19 pandemic has changed the working conditions of journalists, making them even more dependent on digital communication services and social media channels, which has amplified the problem of online violence. The present survey identified that 68% of the attacks arose from the digital environment, while 28.7% were not related to online environments. There was also 3.4% that did not originate on the Internet, but that had repercussions in this space.

PLATFORMS USED

Monitoring indicated that the Twitter platform was used 66 times in the attacks, followed by Instagram (8), Facebook (3), YouTube (3), WhatsApp (3). Websites were only used twice. However, as one of the techniques for collecting the cases was data extraction from Twitter, these cases may be over-represented. Other research points to Facebook as one of the most unsafe platforms for journalists (Posetti et al., 2021).

Platforms used	
Twitter	66
Others	9
Instagram	8
Facebook	3
Youtube	3
WhatsApp	3
Website	2

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This monitoring report outlines a scenario of aggressions and violations against women journalists and gender attacks. In addition, it demonstrates strong participation and initiative by state actors in episodes, often in coordination with other actors, such as trolls and netizens. Although aggressions outside the digital environment are significant and worrying, the results of this research show the weight of social media in the strategies to disqualify and demonize professional journalism. It is possible to identify a clear association between misogynistic narratives and authoritarian trends: most of the aggressions triggered by specific journalistic coverage are linked to political agendas and attempts to prevent journalism from investigating and monitoring state power.

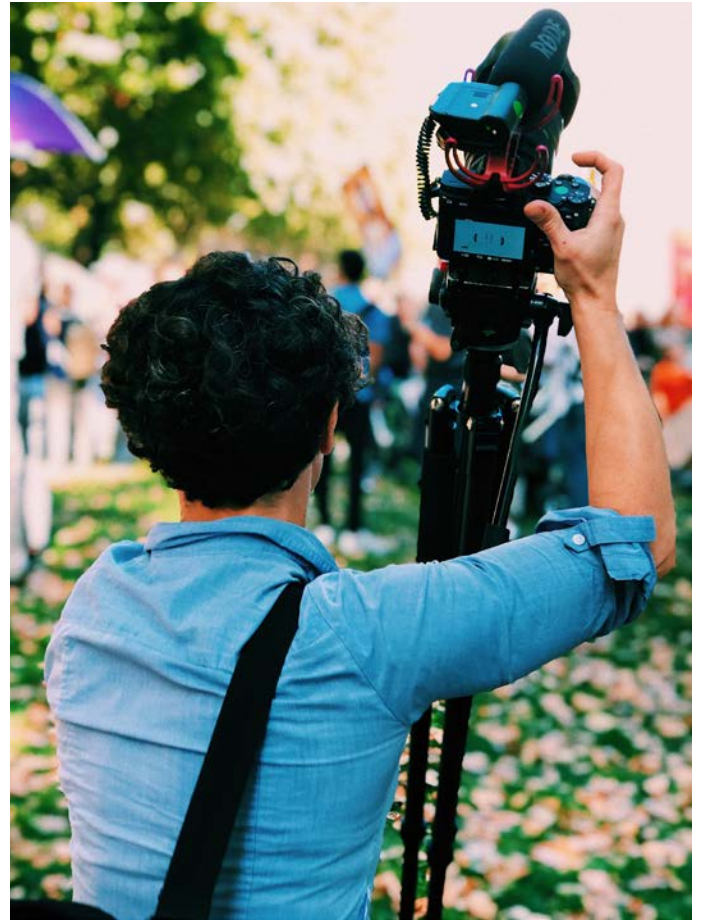
The data presented here likely represent only a fraction of the attacks. It is worth mentioning that the methodology used only records episodes that occurred in the public space, be it virtual or not. Thus, it means that attacks on journalists via private messages did not enter the survey. One of the challenges in recording and combating aggression is the solid tendency for underreporting cases. Qualitative research shows that significant numbers of incidents of abuse go unreported, mainly due to a culture of shame and ineffective legislation (Koraila, 2020). Many journalists do not report abuses and do not receive support from their organizations (Ferrier and Patkar, 2018).

It is necessary to actively work against the normalization of violence and minimize the problem. One of the trends identified in the international literature is to blame the victims themselves for the attacks either by the expectation that they become “less sensitive” or by the pretension that they fight alone the aggressions and harassments (Adams, 2018). In this sense, journalistic organizations must protect their professionals, creating safe channels for reporting and providing legal assistance. They also must invest in building an organizational culture in which violence is taken seriously.

In the case of digital attacks, studies have identified the substantial use of robots, which gives a massive character to the attacks, making it impossible to react individually. Thus, cases require institutional responses. The most significant difficulties in tackling the problem lie in

the fact that, in the social media economy, harassment can be profitable, translating into likes and clicks and, therefore, into profit. That's why organizations need to offer training in digital security, invest in team-building and adopt technological tools for monitoring and protection.

It is necessary to demand that digital platforms make more investments in content moderation, investing notably in employees with training in gender equality and human rights. It becomes essential for platforms to continually review their policies, algorithms, and moderation processes to deal with the ever-evolving nature of online violence. In addition, they must define more effective policies and procedures to detect and penalize repeat offenders and prevent the same offenders from assuming new online identities after being suspended on platforms (Posetti, 2021).



Legislative changes and regulatory legal measures should also be considered, as their potential impact is much more significant than individual or organizational responses. However, such processes are complex and must be regarded as long-term solutions. Representatives should be aware of these institutional movements and the discussions of civil society to propose bills and ways to reduce violence on digital platforms.

In addition, there are some precautions journalists can take as long as their organizations train and support them: use secure and encrypted work tools, create separate personal and professional accounts, delete personal information on websites, and report attacks to their organization and the police. On their side, news organizations can adopt technological tools for automatic moderation, software for identifying attacks, and hiring staff to manage accounts of journalists who are experiencing violence to record evidence for future legal action. Media

organizations can also create guidelines and provide digital security training for new employees.

The urgency of an intersectional and attentive look at the specificities that the gender issue brings to violence against journalists and communicators extends, mainly, to state institutions. Currently, the only internal protection mechanism for press professionals is the Protection Program for Human Rights Defenders (PPDDH), which since 2018 has included Communicators and Environmentalists in its name. Despite this, the inclusion of journalists in the program is limited. In addition to not having security and legal provisions, the methodology does not consider the issue of gender nor the most significant challenges faced by these professionals who are the target of recurrent attacks, such as the strategic use of the Internet and social networks.

We recommend to the Brazilian state to update the protection policy to adapt it to the service of journalists and communication professionals, taking into account the specificities of aggression against women and/or gender attacks, especially for: **(i)** providing protection measures for online attacks, which is the most recurrent form of aggression; **(ii)** including the protection of journalists who cover topics related to politics, as it is the coverage that generates the most attacks; and **(iii)** supporting the initiative on the part of the victim, encouraging complaints and seeking Program protection.

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PARTNERS

