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Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence

An Emerging Issue in Women, Peace and Security



KRISTINE BAEKGAARD

Author

Kristine Baekgaard, 2023-2024 Hillary Rodham Clinton Fellow, Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security

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To contact the Institute or the authors of this report, email: giwps@georgetown.edu.

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Design and layout: Marianne Michalakis, designMind

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Executive Summary

As the uses and abuses of technology develop at a rapid rate, the growing threat and consequences of technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) must be addressed by those working to advance the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda. Existing policies and programs must be adapted and new ones adopted to account for digital dimensions of gender-based violence (GBV) and to keep online spaces safe for women.

Technology has helped advance women's rights around the world in important ways. Technological tools make education and employment more accessible, and online spaces create new opportunities to build movements and amplify calls for equality and justice. These gains serve the goals of the WPS Agenda, which aims to protect and empower women in conflict-affected contexts. Along with these benefits, however, are substantial costs. Globally, 38 percent of women have reported experiencing TFGBV—including instances of cyber-harassment and stalking, doxxing, and image-based sexual abuse.[1] Further, there are increasing reports of digital tools being used to exacerbate offline violence. For example, sexual assaults of Iranian protesters have been filmed and used to blackmail the protesters,[2] and women in Pakistan have been killed as a result of photoshopped images being posted online.[3]

Given the scale, scope, and impact of TFGBV, the WPS field must evolve to account for the unique challenges women are facing in an increasingly digitized world.

National governments and international organizations increasingly recognize TFGBV as a pressing issue. Existing research and policies focus on the impact of TFGBV on specific women—primarily, politicians and journalists—with less attention paid to the implications of TFGBV for the WPS Agenda, particularly with regard to protecting women from GBV and promoting their participation in peace processes. Given the scale, scope, and impact of TFGBV, the WPS field must evolve to account for the unique challenges women are facing in an increasingly digitized world.

Based on a comprehensive desk review of existing TFGBV literature, this report explores the linkages between TFGBV and the goals of the WPS Agenda. The first section introduces the WPS Agenda, specifically focusing on its structure and the context for its creation. The next section links TFGBV with the protection goals of WPS, outlining the prevalence of existing types of digital violence and the challenges with addressing them. It further highlights the link between digital and offline violence, demonstrating that protection efforts must account for a continuum of violence. The third section draws out threats TFGBV poses to the participation goals of WPS. It identifies three key dimensions of TFGBV that hinder women's participation in peace and politics: targeted attacks against prominent women, the "gendered chilling effect" of online violence that discourages women from participating in online spaces, and online radicalization and misogyny.

The fourth and final section highlights four key findings from the report and recommends actions stakeholders can take to integrate TFGBV into WPS efforts.

1. **TFGBV encompasses a wide range of digital and technological threats with substantial implications for the online and offline well-being and security of women and gender-diverse individuals.**

    - Stakeholders should collaborate to create a set of common definitions and terms to accurately and comprehensively describe TFGBV.

    - Governments and international organizations should dedicate funding to address TFGBV and prioritize these efforts as part of WPS and broader security initiatives.

2. **TFGBV exists on a continuum of GBV and can facilitate offline violence in complex ways.**

    - TFGBV should be integrated into existing regulatory frameworks addressing GBV as well as global initiatives that aim to reduce and end violence against women, girls, and gender-diverse individuals.

    - WPS actors and stakeholders must treat TFGBV as seriously as offline GBV, taking steps to integrate prevention and protection measures into programs and policies.

3. **The use of TFGBV to silence women and discourage them from seeking and holding positions of influence is a significant threat to equal and meaningful participation.**

    - WPS actors must safeguard against TFGBV when working to promote women's participation.

    - International coalitions must lobby tech companies and the private sector to ensure consistent standards of regulation and enforcement around the world.

4. **Online misogyny and TFGBV are key drivers of radicalization and violent extremism and are used as recruitment tactics by groups that support rollbacks of women's rights.**

    - WPS policies in the context of countering violent extremism must recognize TFGBV as a gateway to radicalization and tool to incite violence.

    - Governments and international organizations should dedicate funding to interventions focused on preempting radicalization of men and boys in online spaces and supporting deradicalization efforts.

This report is a call for the WPS community to recognize the implications of TFGBV for their work and to take appropriate action. Importantly, initiatives should be informed by those who navigate the gendered opportunities and challenges of technology on a daily basis. In addition to targeted efforts to combat TFGBV, stakeholders must work in parallel to address the root causes of gendered violence, including the ways in which patriarchal norms drive online and offline violence. Given the transnational nature of TFGBV, sustained global collaboration is necessary, and the WPS community represents a critical resource to collectively meet this challenge and make online spaces safe for all.



CSW67 – United Nations Commemoration of International Women's Day 2023 focused on "DigitALL: Innovation and Technology for Gender Equality."
Photo: UN Women/Catianne Tijerina

Introduction

The rapid evolution of technology has played a crucial role in advancing women's empowerment and pushing forward democratic movements around the world.[4] Access to technology and online spaces has expanded women's access to education and employment and enabled the formation and growth of social movements. These advances have been particularly valuable in the context of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda, as technological tools have been used by women-led organizations to amplify advocacy efforts, improve access to decision-makers, advance health and safety resources, and disseminate information on political developments.[5]

However, the benefits of technology have not come without costs, especially for women and gender-diverse people. Globally, 85 percent of women have experienced or witnessed online violence,[6] and women of color and LGBTQ+ individuals are particularly at risk. Ninety-five percent of AI-generated deepfakes on the internet are obscene depictions of women.[7] One-fifth of women who have experienced online violence reported also being attacked offline.[8] As technology continues to advance, so will the mechanisms for perpetrating technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV).

TFGBV poses substantial challenges to the goals of the WPS Agenda because it threatens international peace and security and erodes democracy. Beyond the immediate implications for women's safety and security, a significant and often intentional effect of TFGBV is to silence women's voices. Research shows that a heightened level of women's participation in politics and peacebuilding is associated with lower risks of civil war[9] and more durable peace agreements.[10] The negative impacts of TFGBV on the diversity of participants in politics and peace can help drive instability and political violence on a broader scale. TFGBV can also fuel and be fueled by online misogyny, which in turn intersects with far-right radicalization[11] and extremism.[12] Research shows that far-right radical groups use hatred of women to recruit new supporters,[13] and that online misogyny serves as an entry point to violent extremist groups.[14] These groups are not only violent in their online and offline tactics but also frequently advocate for rollbacks on women's, LGBTQ+, and minority rights.[15]

Despite increasing efforts by national governments and international organizations to grapple with these new and emerging threats, addressing TFGBV is challenging for at least three reasons. First, the rapid evolution of technology means that solutions quickly become obsolete and new threats emerge to replace old ones. Second, TFGBV is a transnational problem that is difficult to track and regulate. And third, TFGBV, like all gender-based violence (GBV), is a consequence of broader gender inequality and tackling it requires the systematic transformation of gender norms. These challenges are substantial, requiring a multifaceted approach to address them.

The WPS Agenda offers a critical policy and normative framework for action. Today, 107 countries have National Action Plans (NAPs) to implement WPS, and international cooperation to advance the WPS Agenda has grown significantly since United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 was adopted in 2000. This cooperation has created a robust global network of actors across governments, multilateral organizations, academia, and civil society that can be mobilized to address the evolving challenges and transnational nature of TFGBV. Integrating WPS activities with efforts to tackle TFGBV efforts is mutually beneficial. When the United Nations adopted UNSCR 1325, the technological landscape was vastly different than it is today. The United Nations has taken steps to address this dramatic change, including issuing a set of recommendations drafted at the 67th Commission on the Status of Women in 2023. Some member states include preliminary language on TFGBV in their NAPs.[16] However, as technology becomes more deeply integrated in conflict, development, and humanitarian work, a more robust approach to TFGBV in the context of WPS is needed. Already, TFGBV has significant implications for the protection and participation pillars of the WPS framework.[17]

This report illustrates how efforts to combat TFGBV and advance WPS are inherently aligned and highlights opportunities for coordinated action. In the first section, we provide a brief overview of the WPS Agenda, focusing on its structure, goals, and current streams of effort. Second, we outline the current landscape of TFGBV and highlight links to the protection pillar of the WPS Agenda. Third, we draw out three dimensions of TFGBV that threaten women's participation: targeted attacks against women, the gendered chilling effect, and online misogyny and radicalization. We conclude by highlighting four key takeaways and opportunities for integrating TFGBV into WPS work.

Key Definitions

Technology-facilitated gender-based violence *(TFGBV)*: "Technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) is any act that is committed, assisted, aggravated, or amplified by the use of information communication technologies or other digital tools, that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual, psychological, social, political, or economic harm, or other infringements of rights and freedoms."[a]

Digital and online: Throughout this report the terms "digital" and "online" are used frequently. "Digital" refers to anything (including images, music, and programs) that is stored in binary format; "online" refers to anything connected to the internet. All things online are digital, but not all things digital are online. TFGBV is always digital and is often, but not always, online.b

[a] Global Partnership for Action on Gender-Based Online Harassment and Abuse (Global Partnership). "Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence: Preliminary Landscape Analysis." London: Global Partnership, July 11, 2023,16. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/64abe2b21121040013ee6576/Technology_facilitated_gender_based_violence_preliminary_landscape_analysis.pdf.

[b] These definitions are taken from Manaher, Shawn. "Digital vs Online: Deciding between Similar Terms." The Content Authority, May 11, 2023. https://thecontentauthority.com/blog/digital-vs-online.

The Women, Peace and Security Agenda

First formalized through UNSCR 1325, the WPS Agenda is a global framework that recognizes women's roles in and experiences of conflict and peace. Governments, civil society organizations, and international organizations implement the WPS Agenda with the fundamental aim of achieving gender equality and long-term security. The WPS Agenda currently includes ten resolutions structured around the following four pillars:

1. Women's equal **participation** in all levels of decision-making, including local, national, and international institutions; in conflict resolution; and in peace processes.

2. The **protection** of women from sexual violence and GBV.

3. The **prevention** of conflict and violence against women.

4. The provision of measures to address women's specific needs in **relief and recovery** efforts.[18]

Historically, WPS efforts across the four pillars have been focused on conflict-affected and developing countries. Over the last decade, however, WPS efforts have evolved, with actors acknowledging that every country has work to do regarding gender equality and women's security.[19] WPS actors have increasingly recognized the role of technology in advancing women's rights and promoting gender equality; they have also come to see, albeit less clearly, the threats these technologies pose.[20] How exactly TFGBV manifests may vary based on context, but every country must be responsive to how gendered dimensions of digital threats undermine national security within and beyond its borders.

Digital Threats: The Landscape of TFGBV

Digital violence impacts the safety, security, and well-being of women and gender-diverse individuals both online and offline, posing new challenges to WPS efforts aimed at preventing and responding to violence against women.

The development of technology and online spaces has presented a double-edged sword for women around the world. Access to mobile devices and the internet has had a revolutionary effect on women's ability to access education and employment, maintain their own personal finances,[21] and amplify their calls for equality and rights.[22] However, new technologies have also introduced avenues for the perpetration of gendered violence. Although men may also be victims of technology-facilitated violence and may even face online harassment based on their gender, women are disproportionately the targets of TFGBV. Statistics paint a grim picture:

- 40 percent of American women (compared with 14 percent of men) attributed the online harassment they experienced to their gender.[23]
- A European study found that women are 27 times more likely to face harassment online than men.[24]
- The Economist's Intelligence Unit conducted a survey of 45 countries and estimated that, globally, 85 percent of women have experienced or witnessed online violence.[25] This number is even higher in Latin America (91 percent) and the Middle East (98 percent).[26]

Indeed, both online and offline, women face gendered threats.[27] Mirroring patterns of offline GBV, individuals at the intersections of other marginalized identities are particularly vulnerable. LGBTQ+ individuals are more likely than any other group to experience online harassment,[28] and a study in South Asia found that 100 percent of transgender respondents had been subjected to online violence.[29] Globally, women of color experience the highest rates and most severe impacts of online violence;[30] among nonwhite women in the United States, 81 percent reported harassment being linked to aspects of their identity.[31] While data is limited, it is known that people with disabilities also face heightened digital risks.[32]

Acknowledging that TFGBV is a problem for most, if not all, women and gender-diverse people and accounting for the intersecting factors that affect how individuals experience such violence are crucial steps in the creation of solutions. Reporting mechanisms must be accessible and available in a wide range of languages and modalities, general education must include digital literacy, and policy responses must meet the needs of a variety of people. As WPS policymakers and practitioners strive to respond to TFGBV threats, they must adopt a "ground-up" approach to contemporary interventions centered on local women's leadership, wisdom, and

needs.[33] Additionally, governments and international organizations must work with tech companies and the private sector to standardize regulations and reporting protocols globally.

Types of TFGBV

TFGBV is often treated as synonymous with social media harassment and understood to primarily affect prominent women, including politicians and journalists. While these threats are among the most visible, the full scope of TFGBV is much greater. The rapidly evolving nature of technology and digital landscapes results in an equally rapid evolution of TFGBV, which makes the phenomenon difficult to track and address. However, it is useful to take stock of current manifestations for several reasons. First, it allows us to push beyond the assumption that TFGBV is limited to misogynistic messages posted on social media and consider the wide variety of digital threats that women face. This, in turn, can improve policymaking and implementation of interventions designed to counter TFGBV—when we identify specific threats, we can create specific solutions. Table 1 lists some of the most prominent forms of TFGBV.

Table 1. Prominent Types of TFGBV

Type of TFGBV	Definition	Prevalence
Astroturfing	A coordinated effort to share damaging content as widely as possible, across multiple channels.	58 percent of women globally report experiencing this.[a]
Cyber-harassment	The repeated use of text and images (frequently, sexual or misogynistic in nature) to instill fear in and intimidate the victim.	66 percent of women globally report experiencing this.[a]
Deepfakes	False images created using the likeness of a real person.	96 percent of deepfakes are nonconsensual sexual deepfakes; of those, 99 percent are of women.[b]
Doxxing	The nonconsensual sharing of real-world information, such as an address, phone number, or legal names to perpetrate violence.	55 percent of women globally report experiencing this.[a]
Hacking and stalking	The nonconsensual interception of an individual's data, whereabouts, and communications.	63 percent of women globally report experiencing this. [a]
Image-based sexual abuse (IBSA)	The nonconsensual sharing of private and intimate images or video for the purpose of harming the victim.	57 percent of women globally report experiencing this.[a]
Sextortion	Threatening to expose sexual images in order to coerce a person to do something.	66 percent of victims are girls under the age of 16.[c]

[a] The Economist Intelligence Unit. "Measuring the Prevalence of Online Violence against Women." Jigsaw infographic, March 1, 2021. https://onlineviolencewomen.eiu.com/.

[b] Dunn, Suzie. "Women, Not Politicians, Are Targeted Most Often by Deepfake Videos." Centre for International Governance Innovation, March 3, 2021. https://www.cigionline.org/articles/women-not-politicians-are-targeted-most-often-deepfake-videos/.

[c] "Sextortion Research and Insights." Thorn (blog), 2017. https://www.thorn.org/sextortion/.

Identifying specific types of TFGBV can help improve policymaking, and establishing a common set of definitions and parameters can strengthen response efforts by standardizing data collection and improving coordination efforts between governments.[34] Although calls for shared definitions have been issued by various actors, including the Global Partnership for Action on Gender-Based Online Harassment and Abuse (Global Partnership), a coalition of 12 countries working together to understand and prevent TFGBV, such definitions have yet to be fully articulated or adopted. To further complicate matters, there are many types of violence that will emerge alongside new technologies, that cannot be discretely categorized, or that call into question what exactly constitutes TFGBV. For example, what label should be used for the creation of a Facebook group that promotes rape-supportive attitudes?[35] Alternatively, does a video game such as the Japanese anime-style "RapeLay," where the player stalks and rapes a fictional mother and daughter, constitute TFGBV?[36] Policy mechanisms, such as the WPS Agenda, should adopt a set of shared definitions of TFGBV to strengthen the coordination of responses to this emerging threat.

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Offline Consequences of TFGBV

TFGBV is frequently part of a larger pattern of violence targeting women, with up to 20 percent of women globally and 53 percent of Arab women reporting that they have experienced offline attacks in association with online violence.[37] The same perpetrator might conduct both online and offline violence or may incite other actors to engage in violence. TFGBV facilitates offline violence in a variety of ways, as the following examples illustrate:

- Hateful online rhetoric can prompt offline attacks by rousing violent sentiments, socially legitimizing violent acts, and identifying targets. A study of the far-right and anti-LGBTQ+ X (formerly Twitter) account "LibsofTikTok" showed that one in four locations, events, or individuals that were targeted by the account experienced some form of offline attack as a result of that engagement.[38]

- In Russia, feminist activist Daria Serenko reported being stalked following the release of her personal information online.[39]

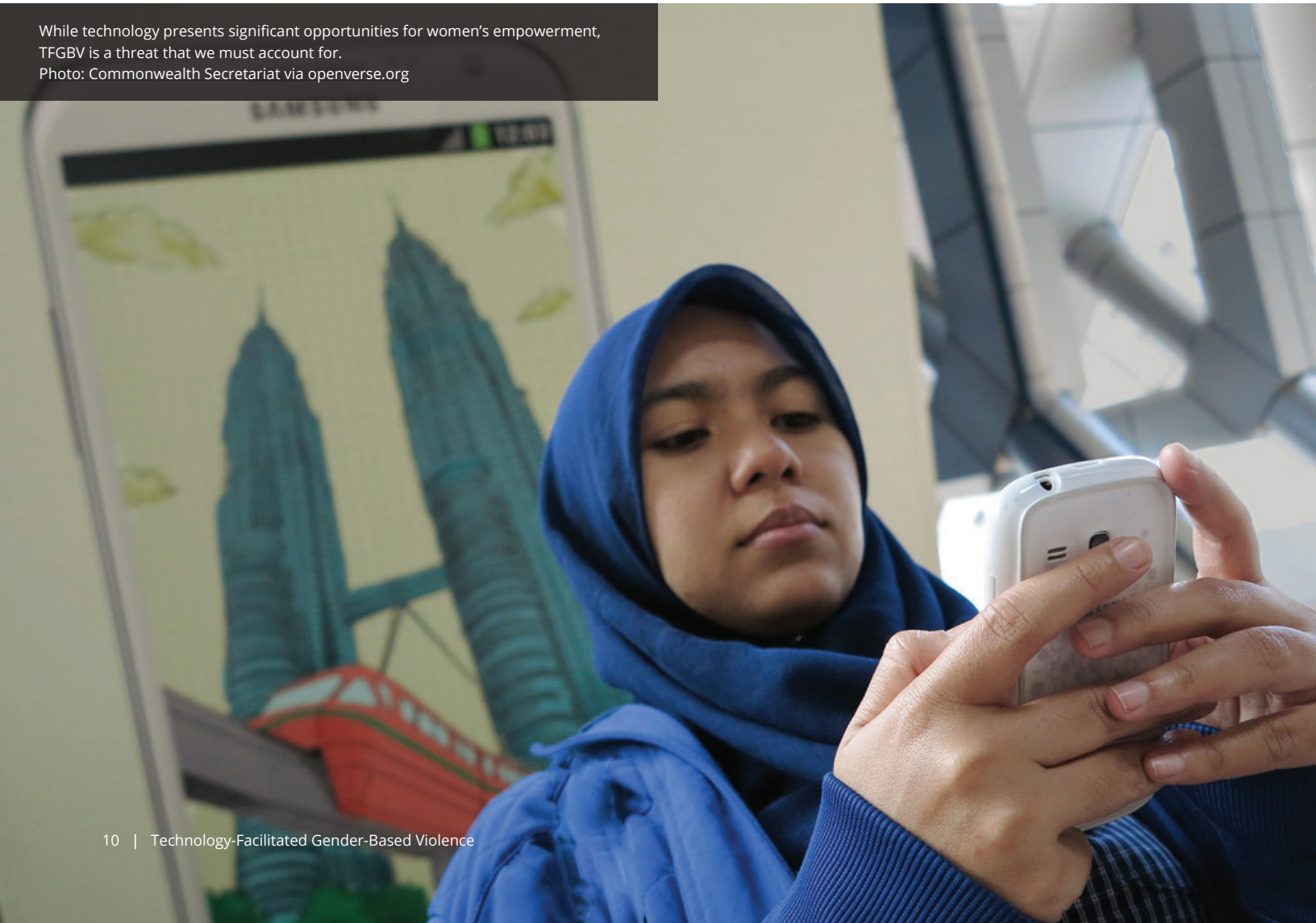
- Doxxing may also lead to more severe forms of violence. An American man impersonated and doxxed his ex-girlfriend on the website Craigslist, sharing her photo and address, leading to another man showing up at her home and raping her at knifepoint.[40]

- An Ethiopian LGBTQ+ support group, House of Guramayle, reports that TikTok is being used to out queer individuals. A man in Addis Ababa was badly beaten in a restaurant after being outed twice on the platform.[41]

- An 18-year-old Pakistani woman was killed in the name of "honor" after a photoshopped image of her with her boyfriend went viral on social media.[42]

- In Myanmar, military supporters use social media to harass women human rights activists, using sexualized language and doxxing. Women have reportedly been subjected to severe harm and arrest by the junta after having their private information shared.[43]

Addressing the various manifestations and potential offline impacts of digital violence is crucial for two reasons. First, it demonstrates that within the realm of protection, WPS efforts must take seriously technological violence and acknowledge the tangible and substantial threat such violence poses to the safety, security, and well-being of women both online and offline. Second, it highlights the complex ways that technology and digital spaces can reinforce harmful patriarchal norms and create new avenues for GBV. In working to address gender inequality broadly, the WPS Agenda must contend with the specific ways TFGBV upholds patriarchy.



While technology presents significant opportunities for women's empowerment, TFGBV is a threat that we must account for.
Photo: Commonwealth Secretariat via openverse.org

TFGBV and Women's Participation and Rights

TFGBV undermines women's political participation, leadership, and advocacy efforts, which are crucial to advancing WPS goals.

Increasing women's inclusion in decision-making is a core focus of WPS work. Research shows that gender equality has a positive impact on peace and security outcomes; countries where women are doing better are also more peaceful, democratic, and prosperous.[44] Countries with higher levels of women's representation in government are more likely to engage in negotiations to end armed conflict.[45] When women are represented in these negotiations, the resulting agreements contain more provisions for political reform;[46] those provisions are more likely to be implemented; and the legitimacy of, credibility of, and broader societal support for social initiatives is substantially improved.[47] It is important to note that these benefits are indicative not of women's inherent peacefulness or preference for diplomacy but of the fact that diverse representation improves decision-making processes and outcomes. For these reasons, issues such as TFGBV that threaten the diversity of participation in politics and public life are threats to democracy, security, and the goals of the WPS Agenda.

The impacts of TFGBV on women's participation, voices, and influence are complex and numerous. This section of the report highlights three key dimensions of TFGBV that WPS stakeholders must account for: targeted violence against women, the gendered chilling effect, and online misogyny and violent extremism. Each of these dimensions is rooted in the same logic of misogyny and inequality that marginalizes women away from positions of power and influence. WPS interventions must continue to address the root causes of gender inequality while accounting for the overlapping and intersecting drivers of insecurity posed by TFGBV.

Targeted Violence against Influential Women

Women politicians, journalists, human rights defenders, and peacebuilders play essential roles in advancing the WPS Agenda. Their prominence, however, exposes them to targeted online violence intended to remove them or discourage them from positions of power. Finding meaningful ways to address the threats they face from TFGBV will be critical to promoting women's leadership and participation in decision-making and their role in fostering sustainable peace.

Targeted hate speech and harassment of prominent women are some of the most visible and frequently discussed manifestations of TFGBV. Women in the public eye, particularly politicians and activists, have long been the victims of physical and psychological violence in the offline world,[48] and the online realm is no different. In recent years, online harassment and violence have come to be known as the "cost of

doing politics"[49] for both women and men working in public spaces.[50] However, "the disproportionate and often strategic targeting of women politicians and activists has direct implications for the democratic process"[51] and for broader issues of peace and security. Women around the world who dare to raise their voices in dissent of oppressive power structures or injustice face substantial risks of TFGBV.

Politicians. Although rates of TFGBV against women politicians are difficult to measure due to reporting bias and privately sent threats, digital abuse against women politicians is clearly a rampant and global issue:

- In a survey of women parliamentarians from 39 countries conducted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union, 81 percent reported that they experienced psychological violence including on digital platforms.[52]

- Among women parliamentarians in the European Union, 59 percent had been the target of sexist attacks on online social networks.[53]

- In member states of the African Union, 42 percent of women politicians have received online death threats, rape threats, or threats of beatings and abductions.[54]

- In Southeast Asia, 50 percent of women politicians have faced online abuse.[55]

For women who are not part of the ethnic majority in a given country, the abuse intensifies. In the United Kingdom, a study found that nearly half of all abuse against female members of Parliament (MPs) on X (formerly Twitter) targeted Diane Abbot, the first black woman elected to the British Parliament, and even when she was removed from the sample, women of color received 30 percent more abuse than white women.[56]

Journalists. Women journalists are among those most targeted by TFGBV. A UNESCO survey found that 73 percent of women reporters have experienced online abuse, including death threats, threats of sexual violence, and image-based sexual abuse.[57] Nearly 50 percent of women journalists reported that these attacks were primarily motivated by their gender,[58] and women who experience multiple forms of marginalization, including racism, anti-Semitism, ableism, and homophobia, experienced heightened exposure and deeper impacts of TFGBV. The extent of harassment can be extreme. Nobel Peace Prize winner Maria Ressa described receiving upward of 90 hate messages an hour during a state-linked disinformation campaign.[59]

Human Rights Activists. Women human rights activists are also among those most vulnerable to online threats.[60] Speaking as the UN Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein highlighted how online tactics are used to "torment and terrorize women who speak out" against injustice, including the Human Rights Council's own rapporteurs.[61] Measuring the prevalence of TFGBV against human rights activists is extremely difficult, but there are accounts of the violence they face. A study of cyberviolence in Albania found that 83 percent of women human rights defenders had experienced a violation of their digital rights and faced daily

threats and harassment.[62] Xheni Karaj, an Albanian LGBTQ+ rights activist, shared an example of the type of violent comments she receives daily: "You should tie her hands and feet with rope and pull apart with two cars, splitting her in two."[63]

Peacebuilders. Although the phenomenon is currently underresearched, emerging evidence suggests that women peacebuilders are also targets of TFGBV, specifically because of their work. The Global Network of Women Peacebuilders and ICT4Peace conducted a study with peacebuilders from 19 countries to explore the challenges technology poses to women in peace processes.[64] One peacebuilder in the study reported that images of herself and her children had been shared online without her consent, and another—a chief negotiator—had received multiple rape and death threats.[65]

While it is commonly assumed that such violence against women is carried out by lone actors, a substantial amount of online violence is actually linked to orchestrated disinformation campaigns, with high-level political leaders and state actors among the most common instigators of online violence.[66] For example, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) uses "sock-puppet" accounts (profiles not explicitly associated with the user controlling them)[67] to retaliate against Chinese feminist movements and to target diaspora women who criticize the CCP; women who become the targets of these campaigns are described as "traitors" and "liars."[68] The "Troll Army" of India's president Narendra Modi, an organized group of far-right users, employs similar tactics, harassing female politicians who criticize his political party.[69] These targeted attacks are a threat to the personal safety of the women in question and also discourage women, particularly minority women, from seeking positions of influence and speaking out against injustice.[70] These trends are particularly concerning for WPS work, as efforts to bring women into positions of power are undermined by risks of TFGBV.

The Gendered Chilling Effect: Silencing Women's Voices Online

The prominence of gendered violence online produces a gendered "chilling effect"—the silencing of women online.[71] Generally, the term "chilling effect" has been used to describe situations in which laws have deterred people from exercising their freedoms for fear of legal repercussions.[72] In the case of TFGBV, the chilling effect occurs when women censor themselves online to avoid violence. By creating a hostile environment for women and LGBTQ+ people in online spaces, TFGBV serves as a mechanism of political and social exclusion. Many girls and women have opted out of politics or public discourse because of TFGBV. A survey of 33 countries conducted by PLAN International found that one in five girls aged 15–24 have stopped engaging in current affairs as a result of their concerns about online violence.[73] In South Asia, 90 percent of women politicians felt that threats of violence shook their resolve to stay in politics.[74] The gendered chilling effect also impacts women journalists. Canadian journalist Tamara Taggart stated after experiencing online harassment: "I would never ever, ever subject myself to that again. It has damaged my mental health. It has made me fear for the safety of my family. It has made me fear for my safety."[75]

By creating a hostile environment for women and LGBTQ+ people in online spaces, TFGBV serves as a mechanism of political and social exclusion.

Even when people who are targeted by TFGBV choose to remain engaged in politics, advocacy, or leadership roles, they may censor themselves and avoid speaking on other topics. For example:

- In the United Kingdom, 73 percent of women MPs (compared to 51 percent of men MPs) opt out of speaking on certain issues online.[76]

- UN Women reported that in India, Pakistan, and Nepal, 60 percent of surveyed women aged 15–44 did not participate in politics due to the fear of violence.[77]

- During debates to legalize abortion in Argentina in 2020, one in three women who participated in those debates were subjected to violence on social media, causing many to withdraw from online discourse altogether.[78]

- Among women journalists, 40 percent stated that they avoid reporting on certain topics for fear of the abuse that they will face.[79]

The gendered chilling effect extends beyond individuals who are in the public eye or the intended target of violence; everyday women who witness this violence are also affected and may choose to leave online spaces or avoid engaging on certain topics online. Given the importance of online spaces for daily life and also as forums for campaigning, democratic discourse, fights against injustice, and building community, the self-censorship of women has significant implications for women's inclusion in social, economic, and political life, including their willingness to put themselves forward for positions of influence. The gendered chilling effect has two significant implications for WPS stakeholders working on initiatives to promote women's inclusion. In the first place, women's *meaningful* participation in peace and security efforts can never be achieved if women are not able to engage on online platforms without fear of violence. Second, WPS efforts to increase women's participation must account for the TFGBV threats women could face as they step into leadership and advocacy roles.

Online Misogyny, Radicalization, and Violent Extremism

A growing body of research links online misogyny with radicalization and argues that backlash against gender equality is part of the mobilization strategy of violent extremist groups.[80] Indeed, online antifeminist groups, known collectively as "the manosphere," are not simply places where men go to speak poorly of women but are forums for the (re)production of violent extremism[81] and recruitment to right-wing groups that advocate for rollbacks of women's and minorities' rights. This particular dynamic of TFGBV is simultaneously one of the most serious and most frequently overlooked; it is notably absent from WPS work.

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The language used on these forums is in and of itself enough to cause alarm. A study by the Centre for Countering Digital Hate (CCDH) found that incel (involuntary celibate) forum members post about rape once every 29 minutes and that 89 percent of these posts are supportive of it.[82] Another 5 percent of posters were not morally against rape but instead found it "unimaginative" and expressed their desire to "reduce a woman to nothing."[83] Between 2021 and 2022, the CCDH also found a 59 percent increase in references to mass murders, primarily centered around the glorification of Elliot Rodgers.[84] In 2014, Rodgers posted a 141-page manifesto before killing six people in a shooting and stabbing spree in California.[85] In his manifesto, he outlined his deep hatred for women and his frustration with his lack of sexual experience; incel forums frequently reference this manifesto, glorifying Rodgers' acts of violence and encouraging others to do the same.[86] Incel terrorism is on the rise, particularly in predominantly white, English-speaking countries,[87] but extreme violence is not the only way the manosphere manifests.

Experts assess that 70 percent of young men today have been exposed to manosphere content,[88] and the prominence and popularity of extreme language about women normalizes everyday forms of violence and abuse. Increased normalization of extreme misogyny is also problematic because it facilitates recruitment for far-right groups that rely on sexism to draw in and mobilize new members.[89] These groups, which hold a wide variety of racist, religious, and politically conservative beliefs, alongside misogyny, also advocate for extreme rollbacks of women's and minority rights, including criminalizing access to abortion and reproductive care, outlawing marriage for gay and lesbian couples, and imposing extreme restrictions on immigration and citizenship.[90] The rise of extreme and everyday online misogyny holds significant implications for WPS efforts; indeed, UNSCR 2242 (a WPS resolution) explicitly recognizes the gendered dynamics of terrorism and violent extremism. Most existing efforts at the intersection of WPS and countering violent extremism (CVE) have focused on the Global South, but they must adapt to take the effects of TFGBV into account. This adaptation may include expanding existing conceptualizations of CVE to include extremism explicitly fueled by misogyny and considering how radicalization plays out in the Global North.

Conclusions and Calls to Action

This report has highlighted some of the ways in which TFGBV impacts WPS work. TFGBV presents a substantial and tangible threat to women's and gender-diverse people's safety and security. Digital threats are pervasive and frequently have offline consequences, and WPS protection efforts must thus integrate considerations of online dimensions of violence. Digital threats also have significant implications for women's ability to participate freely and meaningfully in politics and peacebuilding and for their ability to wield power, and these dynamics must be accounted for in WPS efforts to promote women's participation. Online misogyny, when left unchecked, can fester and fuel violent extremism, presenting a new aspect of CVE that WPS actors must grapple with. As technology continues to advance, so will its abuses, and WPS actors must be alert to how TFGBV influences women's safety, security, and participation.

Despite these connections, policymakers and legislators have been slow to address the intersection of WPS and TFGBV. Many existing TFGBV initiatives either focus on specific groups of women (e.g., journalists)[91] or are limited to specific regions or countries,[92] and few approach the issue from a WPS perspective. Preliminary work to establish global cooperation on the issue of TFGBV has begun, including at the 67th Commission on the Status of Women, and some countries, including the United States, have taken steps to integrate TFGBV into their NAPs.[93] Given the scope and transnational nature of TFGBV, sustained global collaboration is necessary, and international coalitions such as the Global Partnership can serve as valuable facilitators of shared definitions, standards, and action.

The following four key findings of this report could serve as a starting point for catalyzing further action among WPS and TFGBV stakeholders. Each finding is followed by recommendations for coordinated action.

1. **TFGBV encompasses a wide range of digital and technological threats with substantial implications for the online and offline well-being and security of women and gender-diverse individuals.**

    - Stakeholders should collaborate to create a set of common definitions and terms that can be used to accurately and comprehensively describe TFGBV. These definitions must be accessible to and, where possible, adopted by different actors, including WPS-focused agencies and organizations. Using standardized and specific language will facilitate better collaboration across different actors and governments by improving data collection, fostering shared knowledge, and unifying policy and legal approaches.

- Governments and international organizations should dedicate funding to address TFGBV and prioritize these efforts as part of WPS and broader security initiatives. Projects funded should explore how TFGBV is used in conflict and postconflict settings. More specifically, those projects could examine how digital violence is used to target peacebuilders, how online violence can fuel offline violence against women, and how such attacks can be prevented or mitigated.

2. TFGBV exists on a continuum of GBV and can facilitate offline violence in complex ways.

- TFGBV should be integrated into existing regulatory frameworks addressing GBV as well as global initiatives that aim to reduce and end violence against women, girls, and gender-diverse individuals. TFGBV should be understood as an extension of existing challenges rather than a new phenomenon, and stakeholders should aim to integrate TFGBV measures into existing violence prevention efforts.

- WPS actors and stakeholders must treat TFGBV as seriously as offline GBV, taking steps to integrate prevention and protection measures into programs and policies. These steps should include integrating TFGBV training for law enforcement and judicial personnel and providing digital literacy training for women in vulnerable contexts to avoid exploitation.

3. The use of TFGBV to silence women and discourage them from seeking and holding positions of influence is a significant threat to equal and meaningful participation.

- WPS actors must safeguard against TFGBV when working to promote women's participation. Even if women are successfully established as politicians or included in peace negotiations, they face unique threats as a result of TFGBV that might discourage their meaningful participation or expose them to risk. WPS actors should develop mitigation strategies that include mental health resources, legal and other support services, and systems to enable the reporting of cases of abuse.

- International coalitions must lobby tech companies and the private sector to ensure consistent standards of regulation and enforcement around the world. Reporting mechanisms should be made accessible in all languages, and companies should be held accountable for the enforcement of their safety standards.

4. **Online misogyny and TFGBV are key drivers of radicalization and violent extremism and are used as recruitment tactics by groups that support rollbacks of women's rights.**

- WPS policies in the context of CVE must recognize TFGBV as a gateway to radicalization and a tool to incite violence. Gendered online violence should be integrated into CVE identification and prevention protocols.

- Governments and international organizations should dedicate funding to interventions focused on preempting radicalization of men and boys in online spaces and supporting their deradicalization. Neither the goals of the WPS Agenda nor the elimination of TFGBV can be achieved without meaningful engagement with men and boys, and countering violent misogyny through the funding of educational and other initiatives is particularly important.[94]

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