

Gender and women's rights on social media: mobilisations, reactions and sentiment of posts made by presidential candidates in 2022

Analysis by:



- *On Facebook, Jair Bolsonaro's posts on gender-related issues received the highest level engagement compared to the remaining presidential candidates;*
- *Of the Bolsonaro's top 10 Facebook posts with the most interactions, almost half are about abortion and/or make mention of the "left", citing terms like "gender ideology";*
- *When posting about gender-related issues, most candidates used more words with a negative connotation than when addressing other topics.*

As identified in a previous report of the "Media and Democracy" project, the debate on gender issues and women's rights throughout the last electoral year was permeated by discussions about violence against women, empowerment and representation, political participation, maternity, access to education and abortion. In this report, we used a lexical model to classify how candidates discussed the topics above, and concluded that the candidates used more negative¹ words when discussing women

¹ As explained in the section "Sentiment Analysis on Twitter and Facebook" below (p. 6), the parameter for this are words associated with negative sentiments in a scale including positive, negative and neutral, in accordance with the VADER (Valence Aware Dictionary and Sentiment Reasoner) sentiment analysis.

and gender, suggesting that gender equality is still a contentious issue in the political debate.

In terms of engagement, Bolsonaro's online presence garnered the most attention on Facebook, not only for posts about gender but also for those about other topics. Engagement on gender related posts, however, was significantly higher than with other content. The findings in this report were conducted by **Democracy Reporting International** and the **Diversity and Inclusion Program at FGV Law School**.

Methodology

This report analyses the front runners in the 2022 presidential election and the repercussions of their commentary on gender and women's rights issues in their online communications. Using quantitative and qualitative analysis methods, we observed the posts from Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (PT), Jair Bolsonaro (PL), Ciro Gomes (PDT), Simone Tebet (MDB), Vera Lúcia (PSTU), Sofia Manzano (PCB), Léo Péricles (UP), José Maria Eymael (DC), Soraya Thronicke (União Brasil) and Felipe D'Avila (Novo).²

We collected and analysed posts on Facebook and Twitter between March 1st to November 30th 2022, including the period before they officially declared their candidacy³. We measured engagement levels in the posts and used a sentiment analysis technique to identify the major trends in the candidates' social media communications. With a database of 8,817 posts on Facebook and 16,424 posts on Twitter, we created a subset of data based on a list of terms related to gender and women's rights. This list was created by the authors of this report based on discussions encompassing gender, politics, violence and other topics.

Average level of engagement per candidate on posts discussing gender and women's rights issues on Facebook

² The candidate Kelson Luis da Silva Souza does not appear in the analysis because he does not have an official (verified) profile on the networks we analyzed, and because the accounts registered with the Electoral Court are not owned by him, but by Roberto Jefferson – of whom Kelson was originally a vice candidate

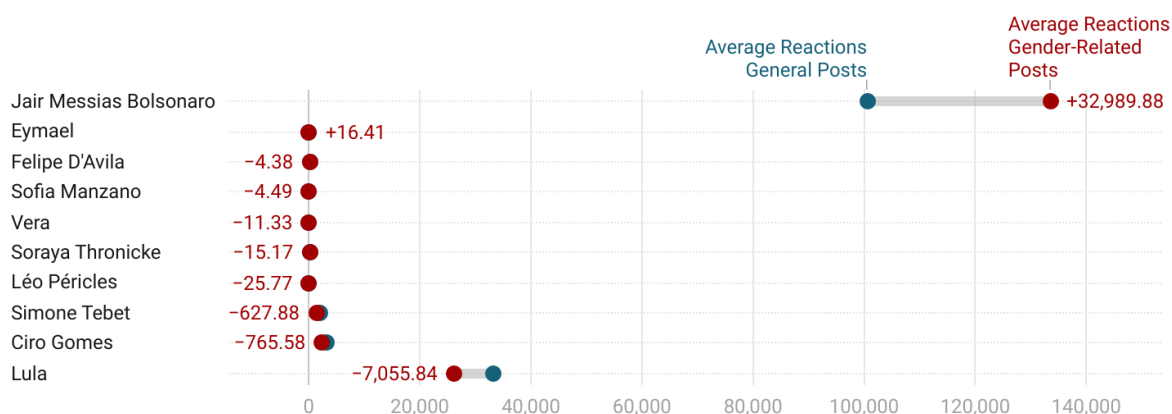
(<https://divulgacandcontas.tse.jus.br/divulga/#/candidato/2022/2040602022/BR/280001734029>).

³ The analysis period was expanded in order to consider most of the electoral year, not only the official campaign period.

Graph 1 shows the difference between the average number of reactions to posts on general topics as compared to those on gender-related topics. The values of average reactions are absolute numbers, calculated by adding the total number of reactions, comments and shares of all posts divided by the total number of posts per candidate.

Graph 1: Average number of reactions to general posts compared to to gender-related posts on Facebook

Period: March 1 to November 30, 2022



Values displayed in the graph show the difference between the average reactions a post received if related to gender issues or not. The higher the number, the more reactions gender-related posts received.

Source: Facebook | Elaborated by: Democracy Reporting International (DRI)

Negative values indicate that posts discussing gender issues received fewer reactions, on average, than those on other topics. The positive values, in turn, signal the average increase in reactions to gender-related posts. That is, each post made by former President Jair Bolsonaro related to gender received on average 32 thousand more reactions than a post of his on other topics.

- Among the posts analysed, those made by former President Jair Bolsonaro demonstrated substantially higher levels of engagement when the then-candidate addressed gender issues and women's rights. The Brazilian data is in line with theoretical studies carried out in other countries that suggest the use of gender issues and women's rights to mobilise feelings and affections, as well as a mobilising and unifying category of support for far-right political agendas⁴;

⁴ Cf. GRZEBALSKA, W.; KOVÁTS, E.; PETÖ, A. Gender as symbolic glue: how 'gender' became an umbrella term for the rejection of the (neo)liberal order. Political Critique, 2017. Disponível em:

- Still regarding engagement, Bolsonaro appeared far ahead of the other candidates on Facebook. While the average of reactions to general posts made by the then-candidate is 100,000, the second highest, Lula's, is less than half. This analysis is in line with the pattern outlined in previous reports from "Media and Democracy", illustrating the online elevated engagement of public figures associated with the conservative political ideologies⁵;
- Of Bolsonaro's top ten posts with the highest number of interactions, and which are gender-related, almost half (four) address abortion, both in a contextual way — such as when he commented on the case of the 11-year-old girl who was raped in Santa Catarina last year and who sought a legal abortion through judicial authorization⁶, stating that "abortion only aggravates this tragedy even more"⁷ — and implicitly by associating the topic with the "leftist" agenda. In total, Bolsonaro mentioned the word "abortion" in 25% of his gender-related Facebook posts;
- The same top ten posts with the greatest engagement also consistently named the "left" as responsible for the defence of agendas that would put women at risk. For example, in one post Bolsonaro claims that "the left" defends drug trafficking, and that the latter operates through the murder and dismemberment of women (this post alone added up to 236,022 interactions, with 189,501 reactions, 17,730 comments and 28,791 shares);

<http://politicalcritique.org/long-read/2017/gender-as-symbolic-glue-how-gender-became-an-umbrella-term-for-the-rejection-of-the-neoliberal-order/>. Accessed on: Mar 21, 2023; DIETZE, G.; ROTH, J. Right-wing populism and gender: a preliminary cartography of an emergent field of research. *Right-Wing Populism and Gender, European Perspectives and Beyond*, p. 7–21, 2020; SAUER, B. Authoritarian right-wing populism as masculinist identity politics. The role of affects. In: DIETZE, G.; ROTH, J. (Eds.). *Right-Wing Populism and Gender: European Perspectives and Beyond*. [s.l.] transcript-Verlag, 2020. p. 23–40.

⁵ For more on this subject, see the reports "From racism to the economy: female representatives reinforce dispute between government and opposition on Facebook" and "Yanomami humanitarian crisis mobilizes political fields on digital media in debate on cause and accountability", published in March 2023.

⁶ Available at: <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/cotidiano/2022/06/bolsonaro-posta-foto-de-bebe-e-diz-que-aborto-so-agrava-mais-tragedia.shtml>. Accessed on: Mar 17, 2023.

⁷ Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/522422702568489/posts/595003581977067>. Accessed on: 20 mar. 2023. Sofia Manzano and Vera Lúcia expressed themselves on the subject in their Twitter profiles, repudiating the obstacles imposed on the legal right to perform an abortion and stating that "Children are not mothers! Rapists are not fathers!" Available at: <http://www.twitter.com/Vera/status/1540333004379361281> and <http://www.twitter.com/SofiaManzano/status/1539072009694593027>. Accessed on: Mar 24, 2023.



Jair Messias Bolsonaro ✓

14 de julho de 2022 · 🌐

- É absurdo querer proibir o uso da bandeira do Brasil sob justificativa eleitoral. Não tenho culpa se resgatamos os valores e símbolos nacionais que a esquerda abandonou para dar lugar a bandeiras vermelhas, a internacional socialista e pautas como aborto e liberação de drogas.

👍❤️ 283 mil

42 mil comentários 21 mil compartilhamentos

Caption: *"It is absurd to want to prohibit the use of the Brazilian flag under electoral justification. It is not my fault if we rescued the national values and symbols that the left abandoned to give way to red flags, the socialist international and agendas such as abortion and drug release".*

Source: Facebook | Elaborated by: Diversity and Inclusion Program (FGV Direito Rio)

- Candidate Eymael's posts regarding gender had the second highest engagement. His references to women were made in general to specify their gender, without indicating a specific agenda (e.g., "men and women"); to address his initiatives aimed at women in the labour market and to mention female entrepreneurs; to echo female candidates, including that of his daughter, Teresa Eymael; and to make flattering comments;
- When looking at Eymael's ten posts with the most interaction on Facebook, we found that 60% of them were classified as having positive sentiment, which corroborates the analysis above, according to which the candidate's level of engagement is not associated with critical issues, as in the case of the former president⁸;

⁸ Regarding the sentiment analysis of the posts, see the following section in this report, "Sentiment Analysis on Twitter and Facebook".



Eymael

14 de julho de 2022

Momento inesquecível, ainda há pouco, com lideranças femininas. Mulheres empreendedoras que consolidam seu espaço no meio empresarial da cidade de Taboão da Serra.
Parabéns a todas pela iniciativa e em especial a nossa querida Presidente da DC de Taboão, Paula Barros!
Parabenizo-a Presidente, pois é com pessoas como ela que a Democracia Cristã se perpetua em todo Brasil!
Registro ainda, com muito respeito, a presença do vereador Dr André do Sorriso e demais correligionários, que prestigiaram o evento!
Abaixo imagens desse momento inesquecível junto a essas guerreiras de meu país!



Eymael

4 de setembro de 2022

MINHA HOMENAGEM À MULHER !

A Mulher é a CONSCIÊNCIA dos Partidos Políticos !

A Mulher é um SER UNO!

A Mulher NÃO SE DIVIDE!

A Mulher NÃO ACEITA que se combine uma coisa E DEPOIS SE FAÇA OUTRA!

PARABENS, MULHERES DO BRASIL!

Sinais! Fortes Sinais!

Top post: *"Unforgettable moment, just a moment ago, with female leaders. Enterprising women who are consolidating their space in the business environment of the city of Taboão da Serra. Congratulations to all of them for the initiative and especially to our dear President of Taboão's DC, Paula Barros! I congratulate her, as it is with people like her that Christian Democracy is perpetuated throughout Brazil!"*

Bottom post: *"MY TRIBUTE TO WOMEN !*

Woman is the AWARENESS of Political Parties !

Woman is a UNIQUE BEING !

Women DO NOT DIVIDE!

Women DO NOT ACCEPT that you agree on one thing and then do something else!

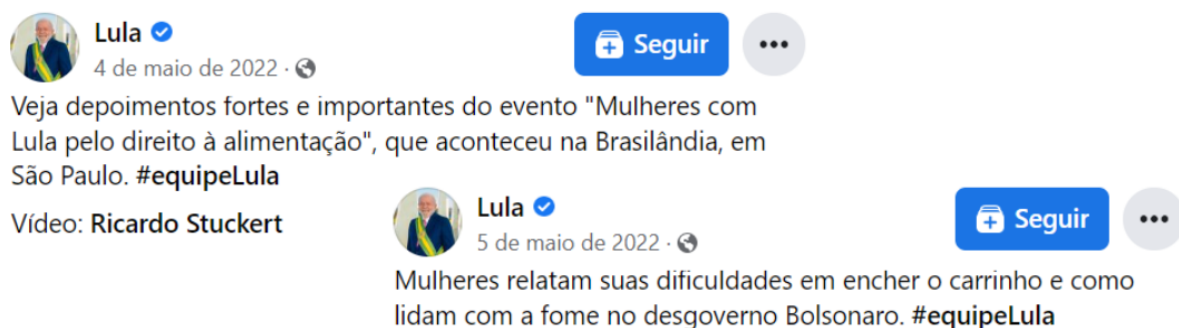
CONGRATULATIONS, WOMEN OF BRAZIL!

Signs! Strong signs!"

Source: Facebook | Elaborated by: Diversity and Inclusion Program (FGV Direito Rio)

- The rest of the candidates maintained similar averages among themselves regarding topics that address gender issues and general topics. It is interesting to note, however, in the case of President Lula, the level of engagement on gender-related posts on Facebook is lower than the engagement in posts about other subjects;
- Among Lula's posts about gender and with the highest engagement levels, he mentions women's relevance to the electoral process (e.g. "A message for Brazilian women. You are the majority, you can change the course of Brazil!

#equipeLula⁹); and espouses the difficulties faced specifically by women, who, according to the then-candidate, were allegedly falling into debt and reporting difficulties to "fill the shopping cart" due to the economic and social situation of the country.



Left post: *"I see strong and important statements from the event 'Women with Lula for the right to food', which took place in Brasília in São Paulo".*

Right post: *"Women report their difficulties in filling the shopping cart and how they deal with hunger in the misgovernment under Bolsonaro".*

Source: Facebook | Elaborated by: Diversity and Inclusion Program (FGV Direito Rio)

Sentiment Analysis on Twitter and Facebook

Sentiment analysis is a natural language processing (NLP) technique that aims to identify the emotional polarity in a text, usually classifying it as positive, negative or neutral. Using a pre-trained model for sentiment analysis¹⁰, we analysed the candidates' posts to understand the sentiment attached to their messages. This model combines qualitative and quantitative methods to produce, and then empirically validate, a sentiment lexicon. Therefore, it is possible to analyse lexical features that incorporate grammatical concepts used when expressing or emphasising the intensity of sentiments.

Using this model, we were able to classify the posts by candidates, based on the terms and words they used, into negative, neutral and positive posts. The charts below show the percentage difference between the average negative sentiment that posts related to gender issues and women's rights – as well as other topics – received

⁹ Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/267949976607343/posts/5062002963868663/>. Accessed on: Mar 23, 2023.

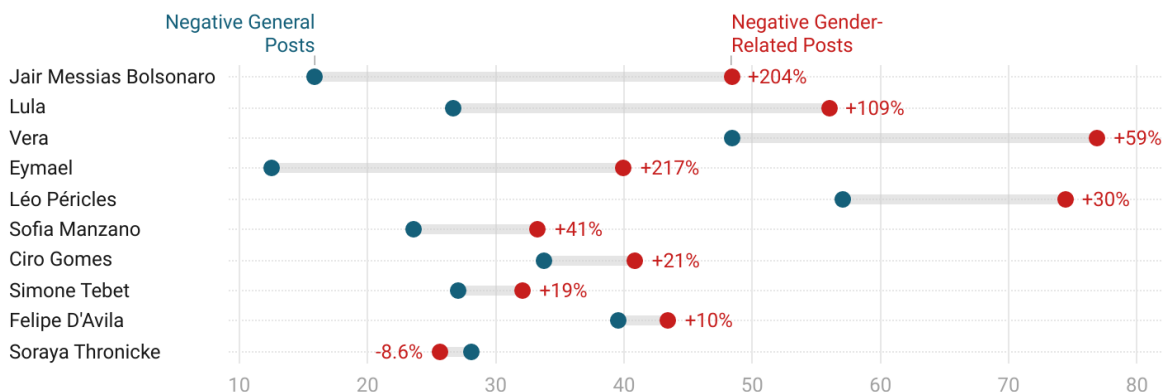
¹⁰ [LeIA \(Léxico para Inferência Adaptada\)](#) is a fork of the VADER (Valence Aware Dictionary and Sentiment Reasoner) lexicon and sentiment analysis tool adapted for Portuguese text.

from the model used. The higher the percentage, the higher the average number of posts classified as negative.

The pattern identified from the sentiment classification does not necessarily indicate that the posts are negative towards women (e.g. using offensive comments to attack them), but it does suggest that discussions of their political agendas or episodes they are part of are repeatedly associated with issues or terms read as negative.

Graph 2: Difference between the average negative sentiment in general posts and in gender-related posts on Facebook

Period: March 1 to November 30, 2022



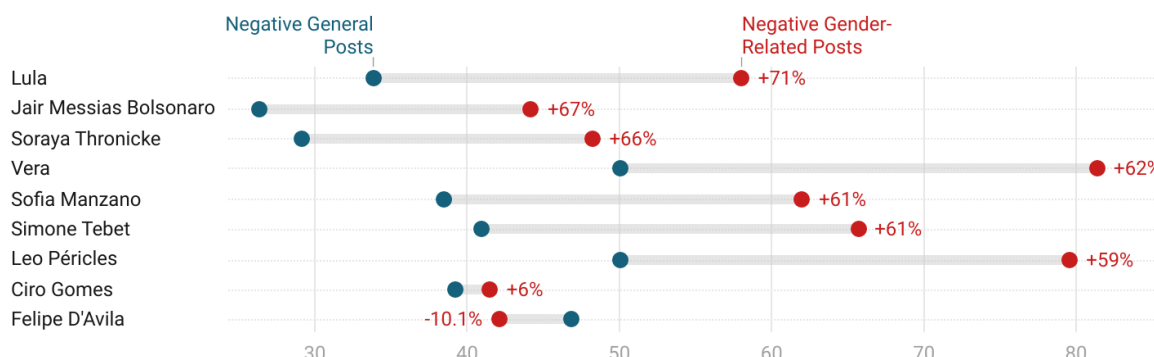
Higher percentage values represent an increase in negative sentiment on gender-related posts.

Source: Facebook | Elaborated by: Democracy Reporting International (DRI)

- On average, Facebook posts whose topic was related to gender and women's rights were classified by our model as being 70% more negative than those on other subjects, with only Soraya Thronicke deviating from the pattern. On Twitter, the average dropped to just over 44%, with the deviation identified in Felipe D'Avila's posts (cf. Graph 3, below);

Graph 3: Difference between the average negative sentiment in general posts and in gender-related posts on Twitter

Period: March 1 to November 30, 2022



Higher percentage values represent an increase in negative sentiment on gender-related posts.

Source: Twitter | Elaborated by: Democracy Reporting International (DRI)

- Most of the tweets classified as negative made explicit mention to cases of violence, abortion (particularly for Bolsonaro, Sofia Manzano and Vera Lúcia, considering the different approaches explained above¹¹), hunger, vulnerability, racism, feminism, and fascism;
- On Facebook, the pattern is repeated, with publications that address topics such as domestic violence, rape, sexism and poverty. Moreover, among the set of publications classified as negative, more than 30% had the word “fight”, indicating that candidates emphasised the need to fight for the rights of women, Black and LGBTQIA+ population;
- Broadly speaking, this set of publications emphasised violent practices against women and addressed ways to fight them, usually calling for the election of a candidate who would commit themselves to confronting the problems identified;

¹¹ See the subtopic “Abortion” of the section “Major terms and topics used in posts discussing gender online” in the report “From violence to empowerment: how candidates in the 2022 Brazilian presidential elections addressed women’s rights and gender issues”.



Top left post from Sofia Manzano: "The agenda of legal abortion can and should be debated at election time. But we will not stop here, we have to continue this fight until victory. It doesn't matter to me whether it increases or decreases the vote. Elections don't solve everything. It only advances the battle".

Bottom left post from Lula: "In Brazil, 1 in every 4 women is a victim of violence. Every six hours, a femicide is registered. Meanwhile, the current government is cutting funds for combating violence against women. It is necessary to change this reality. Let's go together for women and for Brazil".

Top right post from Simone Tebet: "To be a feminist is to defend women's rights. It is defending equal pay for men and women, it is fighting violence against women. Feminism in Brazil needs to be understood as an agenda for all women".

Middle right post from Vera: "Not responding to the extent deserved to the abortion issue made by Bolsonaro is a pity. Here it is about the fight against the ultra-right and its reactionism. On the national network, Lula was silent on the important struggle of women for the right to safe abortion!"

Bottom right post from Soraya Thronicke: "And then you come across a woman committing political violence against women Shameful, sad, small, despicable".

Source: Twitter | Elaborated by: Diversity and Inclusion Program (FGV Direito Rio)

- When contextualising the analysis, it is understandable that Vera Lúcia and Léo Péricles' appear as the most negative in general. This is a consequence of their explicit manifestation of socioeconomic problems that, in the election period, gain even more prevalence in the public debate;

- On the other hand, it is important to highlight that Bolsonaro's posts within this data subset — totaling 15 on Facebook and 23 on Twitter — are thematically dominated by abortion and "the left". In the case of abortion, the occurrences of the word add up to almost half of the total posts on Twitter (eleven) and just over half on Facebook (eight), all of them repudiating the practice, following the pattern outlined throughout this report.

About the project **Media and Democracy**

The **School of Communication, Media and Information at Fundação Getulio Vargas** (FGV ECMI) and the **European Union** (EU) have established a partnership to collaborate on strengthening the Brazilian democracy and the integrity of digital spaces. The initiative is called the **Media and Democracy Project** and will be carried out in conjunction with the fact-checking platform **Lupa**, the German center for public debate analysis **Democracy Reporting International** (DRI), the Diversity and Inclusion Program and the Center for Technology and Society, both from **FGV Direito Rio**, focusing on debates on gender issues, racial inequality, minority rights, hate speech and other important issues for Brazilian politics. The project includes digital media monitoring and analysis, information checking, and the creation of a Council to serve as a public space for the promotion of positive conversations with the participation of researchers, the civil society, public representatives, and platform representatives.

Autorship:

This report was written by the Diversity and Inclusion Program of [FGV Rio de Janeiro Law School](#) (FGV Direito Rio) and [Democracy Reporting International](#) (DRI), with data analysis conducted by both institutions, and collection and visualisation developed by Democracy Reporting International (DRI).

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