Inter-Parliamentary Union
For democracy. For everyone.

When the public turns hostile

Political violence against parliamentarians

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Foreword

Parliamentarians must be able to exercise their mandate freely and without fear. Vigorous criticism and political disagreement are integral to democratic life, but intimidation, harassment and violence are not. When members of the public seek to influence or silence elected representatives through threats or abuse, the consequences extend beyond individual parliamentarians and directly affect the authority, functioning and legitimacy of parliament as an institution.

The IPU has long documented violence against parliamentarians and has drawn international attention to pervasive violence against women in politics and its corrosive effects on democratic representation. This report builds on that body of work while adopting a broader institutional perspective. It examines intimidation by members of the public as a phenomenon that affects parliament as a whole, before turning to the question of which parliamentarians are most exposed and how such violence is experienced across different groups.

Addressing the intimidation of parliamentarians lies at the core of the IPU's mandate to strengthen parliaments and uphold democratic institutions. As the global organization of national parliaments, the IPU is uniquely placed to examine how intimidation by members of the public affects parliamentarians across diverse political systems and social contexts. Understanding these dynamics is essential not only for protecting individual parliamentarians, but also for safeguarding the integrity of representative democracy, sustaining inclusive political participation, and enabling parliaments to fulfil their constitutional roles effectively.

The impact of public hostility therefore extends beyond safety and well-being; it affects the quality of democratic representation itself. By shaping behaviour, silencing voices and discouraging participation, intimidation risks narrowing the range of perspectives present in public debate, and weakening parliaments as arenas of pluralism, deliberation and accountability.

Drawing on original survey data and country case studies, the report shows that intimidation of parliamentarians — both online and offline — is widespread and often recurrent. Many parliamentarians report changing their behaviour in response to intimidation, and some regard such abuse as an unavoidable feature of political life. Normalizing intimidation in this way risks narrowing democratic debate, deterring participation and weakening representative institutions.

This publication is intended to support parliaments in moving from recognition to response. By documenting the prevalence, forms and impacts of intimidation by the public, it provides an evidence base for strengthening prevention, protection and support measures for parliamentarians and their staff. It calls on parliaments to assess whether existing frameworks are adequate, to address intimidation consistently across online and offline spaces, and to reaffirm a clear institutional boundary: democratic disagreement is legitimate, intimidation and violence are not.

Martin Chungong
Secretary General
Inter-Parliamentary Union

Violence is heavily concentrated online. © Ralf Geither/Shutterstock

Executive summary

Why this report matters

Parliamentarians[1] around the world are facing growing levels of intimidation, harassment and violence from members of the public. While disagreement and protest are essential elements of democratic life, this report documents a shift towards behaviour that seeks to threaten, silence or punish MPs. This trend has serious consequences, not only for the safety and well-being of individual MPs, but also for the functioning of parliaments and the quality of democratic debate. Beyond individual harm, intimidation functions as a constraint on democratic life, shaping behaviour, narrowing participation, and weakening the quality of political representation.

This study examines intimidation by the public as a form of political violence. Drawing on five national case studies – Argentina, Benin, Italy, Malaysia and the Netherlands – and a global survey, it provides one of the most comprehensive cross-national pictures to date of how parliamentarians experience this phenomenon, how it has been changing and who is most affected. Beyond individual harm, intimidation functions as a constraint on democratic life, shaping behaviour, narrowing participation, and weakening the quality of political representation.

The scale of the problem

A total of 519 parliamentarians participated in the research across the five national case studies and the global survey.[2] The findings show that intimidation by members of the public is widespread:

- Overall, 71% of all respondents reported having experienced violence by the public, whether online, offline or both.
- Violence is heavily concentrated online, with between 65% and 77% of MPs across the case studies reporting online abuse.
- Offline violence, while less prevalent, remains significant and varies sharply by country:
  - ↘ In the Netherlands, 17% of MPs reported offline violence.
  - ↘ In Benin, that figure rose to 46%.

1 For the purposes of this report, "parliamentarians" and "MPs" are used interchangeably.

2 For the global survey, 3,390 MPs were randomly selected from the IPU database. The sampling was stratified based on area and gender.

Most respondents believe that the situation is deteriorating. Across the five countries, a majority of MPs reported that violence by the public had increased over the past five years, although the strength of this perception varied by context and gender. The perception of increase was strongest in Argentina and the Netherlands, where around 8 out of 10 MPs reported it. In Malaysia, nearly two thirds of MPs shared this view. In Italy, the perception was weaker, especially among men, while in Benin it was more moderate, with clear gender differences.

The global survey confirmed this broader trend: 64% of male MPs and 86% of female MPs reported that violence had increased in recent years.

Online violence as the dominant form of intimidation

Across all five case studies, online violence emerged as the primary form of intimidation faced by parliamentarians. MPs most commonly reported:

- insults and degrading language
- the spread of false or misleading information
- threats

For many MPs, these experiences are **recurrent rather than exceptional**, occurring monthly, weekly or even daily. Online violence is frequently triggered by elections, high-profile legislative debates or polarizing political issues.

Importantly, the impact of online violence is not confined to the digital sphere. MPs consistently reported that sustained online abuse had affected their offline behaviour, including their willingness to engage publicly, their sense of personal safety and their overall capacity to perform parliamentary duties.

Offline violence is less frequent but still serious

Offline violence was reported less frequently than online abuse but remains a serious concern. This form of violence includes verbal aggression, threats, harassment in public spaces and, in some cases, physical attacks. Levels of offline violence vary widely between countries, reflecting differences in political culture, public trust in institutions, and security environments.

The Benin Parliament is one of the five case studies. © Assemblée nationale du Bénin

Many parliamentarians reported experiencing **both online and offline violence** – a finding that underscores the cumulative and reinforcing nature of intimidation.

Violence is not universally accepted as "the cost of doing politics" but normalization remains a significant concern

Some 44% of survey respondents considered violence to be part of political life. This striking finding points to a troubling degree of normalization and acceptance. Although most parliamentarians (56%) rejected the notion that violence was a normal feature of politics, the share of those holding this view varied widely across contexts, from just 39% in Malaysia to 79% in Italy.

These disparities suggest that national context, prolonged exposure to intimidation, and weak or inconsistent institutional responses play a decisive role in shaping not only individual perceptions but also institutional tolerance thresholds. Over time, this risks normalizing conduct by the public that constitutes intimidation or abuse by presenting it as legitimate political criticism.

A clear gender dimension – affecting both women and men

Violence by members of the public affects both women and men parliamentarians, albeit in different ways and with different patterns of intensity.

Across the five national case studies, 76% of women reported being exposed to violence by the public (online, offline or both). The proportion among men was also high – 68% across the national case studies and 69% in the global survey – underscoring the fact that intimidation is not a marginal experience for male MPs either. Where gender differences emerged most clearly was not in whether violence occurred, but in how it was expressed.

Online violence dominates for both women and men, with insults, fake news and threats being the most commonly reported forms across genders. The global survey confirmed this shared exposure: 89% of male MPs reported experiencing online insults, compared with 94% of women. Men also reported substantial exposure to threats, in some cases at higher levels than suggested by country-level data, both online and offline.

Offline violence shows a different pattern. While less widespread overall, it was more frequently reported by men in several contexts. According to the global survey, 22% of men – compared with 15% of women – experienced diverse forms of offline violence.

Women, by contrast, are more affected by gendered and sexualized forms of violence, particularly online. In Argentina, Italy and Malaysia, women reported higher exposure to insults, fake news and sexual harassment. In Malaysia, for example, 75% of women MPs reported insults and fake news, compared with 62% and 52% of men, respectively. In the Netherlands, gender differences were smaller, though women still reported slightly higher exposure to sexual harassment. In Benin, meanwhile, men reported higher exposure to fake news, hacking and threats, while women experienced moderately higher levels of sexualized abuse.

Overall, intimidation by the public is a shared experience across genders, but one that manifests differently. Women are more likely to face sexualized and identity-based attacks, while men more often encounter a broader mix of threats and offline aggression. Both patterns are harmful and undermine democratic participation.

Compounded vulnerabilities

MPs with compounded vulnerabilities – combining gender-based risk with membership in minority or disadvantaged groups – reported higher exposure to online violence across several case studies. This pattern was confirmed by the global survey.

By contrast, offline violence shows no consistent association with gender or minority status, suggesting that different mechanisms drive online and offline aggression. These findings underline the fact that political violence often mirrors and reinforces existing social inequalities.

Consequences for parliamentary work and democracy

Violence by the public has tangible consequences. Many MPs reported the following impacts:

- Self-censorship and reduced public expression
- Avoidance of media engagement or public appearances
- Changes to daily routines and security arrangements
- Spillover effects on family members
- Negative impacts on mental health and well-being

These effects go beyond individual harm. They shape who speaks, who participates and who remains in politics. Over time, intimidation risks narrowing representation, discouraging diversity and weakening parliaments as institutions of democratic deliberation, policymaking and accountability.

From evidence to action

The findings of this report point clearly to the need for practical, institutional responses. The recommendations that follow call on parliaments to develop clear reporting channels, tailored support mechanisms and coordinated responses, particularly in relation to online abuse. They emphasize the importance of recognizing violence by the public as a democratic risk, not a personal inconvenience, and of addressing gendered and compounded vulnerabilities without treating intimidation as inevitable. Central to these recommendations is the role of political and parliamentary leadership in setting boundaries for acceptable public discourse and ensuring that intimidation does not succeed in silencing elected representatives.

Ms. Jo Cox was murdered while carrying out her constituency duties. © AFP/Daniel Leal-Olivas

I. Introduction

In recent years, parliamentarians in many countries have faced a rise in intimidation and harassment from the public. While disagreement between citizens and their representatives is natural in democratic life, the escalation into threats and, in some tragic cases, deadly violence marks a disturbing departure. In the United Kingdom, two MPs – Ms. Jo Cox in 2016 and Mr. David Amess in 2021 – were murdered while carrying out their constituency duties. There are, unfortunately, plenty of examples of violence against parliamentarians in other countries and across different continents, reminding us that this is a global challenge.

Such incidents are not isolated tragedies but symptoms of a wider climate of hostility. They are driven by a combination of factors: the rise of political polarization, economic and social pressures that fuel frustration, the amplification of anger through social media, and a growing distrust in institutions. In this environment, parliamentarians – once viewed primarily as public servants – are increasingly treated as lightning rods for public discontent.

For the purposes of this report, intimidation is examined as a form of political violence – that is, the use or threat of force, harassment or coercion against elected representatives with the aim of influencing their behaviour, restricting their participation or undermining the legitimacy of democratic institutions. When viewed in this context, intimidation not only poses a personal or occupational risk to parliamentarians but also directly undermines the functioning of representative democracy.

The effects are corrosive. Intimidation by the public not only endangers the physical safety of individual representatives but also undermines their ability to work effectively, discourages them from engaging openly with citizens and risks silencing diverse voices in political life. Over time, this weakens parliament as an institution, erodes the quality of democratic debate, and deters capable individuals from pursuing public office.

This report examines intimidation of parliamentarians as a phenomenon with profound consequences for democracy. Drawing on survey data and country case studies, it seeks to document how intimidation is experienced, how it is perceived, and what it means for those in public life. The aim is therefore twofold: first, to provide evidence of the scale and character of intimidation by the public across contexts, and second, to identify the social and political dynamics that explain its rise. In doing so, the report moves beyond individual incidents to shed light on a broader pattern that requires urgent attention if parliaments are to remain open, representative, and resilient.

II. Conceptual framework

Violence by the public against parliamentarians cannot be studied without first clarifying the key concepts. Relying on common standards allows for comparison across contexts and time and reveals the political choices behind the labelling of certain actions as "violence". This approach moves beyond anecdotal accounts and supports a more systematic understanding of the mechanisms, motivations, and consequences of violence in politics.

The framework draws on terminology from public health, labour law, political science, gender studies, and digital governance. It aims to provide a multidimensional, intersectional lens that reflects the complex and evolving nature of political violence, particularly when directed at elected representatives.

Definitions

We adopt a broad, integrated definition of political violence, starting from the World Health Organization's view of violence as "the intentional or unintentional use of force – physical or psychological, threatened or actual – against an individual, a group, or an institution" (Krug *et al.*, 2002). This framing captures both direct and indirect harm, as well as individual and collective experiences, and motivations ranging from political to racial or gender-based.

Building on this, we define political violence as the use or threat of physical, psychological or symbolic harm – by State or non-State actors – with the purpose of influencing political processes, gaining or retaining power, or undermining political legitimacy. It covers not only overt acts like physical attacks, riots and terrorism, but also more subtle or diffuse forms such as online harassment, smear campaigns and public intimidation.

This definition draws on diverse sources to reflect the evolving and multidimensional nature of political violence. Bardall and Myers (2018) stress its impact on electoral processes, Moser and Clark (2001) emphasize its role in securing or maintaining power, and broader approaches, such as those of Kalyvas (2013) and UNDRR and ISC (2025) highlight the involvement of multiple actors and the range of violent practices. An integrated view is vital to capture symbolic as well as material dimensions, formal and informal expressions, and the regional and ideological variations shaping political violence today.

Typologies of violence against parliamentarians

This study identifies two main forms of violence against parliamentarians – physical and online – to analyse how harm is carried out.

Physical violence includes acts of direct bodily harm, harassment or threats. It is the most visible and extreme form, often marking the final stage of conflict. While relatively rare, such incidents draw intense public attention and create a chilling effect on political participation.

Online violence, meanwhile, is a distinct and increasingly common form of aggression. More than digital harassment, it operates as a political tool that enables scalable, targeted and even transnational attacks. Following definitions from NDI (2019) and recent scholarship (Esposito, 2021; Bjarnegård & Zetterberg, 2023), this category includes psychological and symbolic harm such as disinformation, gendered slurs, body shaming and threats, particularly against women, LGBTQ+ individuals, and racial and religious minorities. Its normalization and detachment from physical proximity expand its reach and impact, with tangible consequences for offline behaviour and institutional legitimacy.

Together, these two forms capture the layered, intersectional nature of violence directed at parliamentarians and provide tools for understanding how such violence fuels exclusion, silencing and democratic erosion.

III. The state of the art of relevant research

Most scholarship on political violence has focused on how violence and intimidation target citizens, voters and activists. More recently, however, researchers have begun to examine, measure and address hostility aimed at political figures themselves – particularly women (Krook, 2017; Krook & Restrepo Sanin, 2019; Bjarnegård & Zetterberg, 2023). Violence against politicians is now a growing concern, affecting even established democracies amid a wider trend of democratic backsliding (Klarhoefer, 2024).

Yet progress in building comprehensive data on political violence remains limited. Key obstacles include the lack of a standardized definition, the wide variety of forms and contexts, persistent underreporting, the absence of longitudinal studies, and the fast-evolving nature of digital interactions.

The prevalence of harassment and violence towards MPs

Research done by others suggests that between 30% and 98% of parliamentarians surveyed have experienced some form of aggression.

In the United Kingdom, a 2010 study found that 81% of 239 MPs had encountered at least one type of intrusive or aggressive conduct from a list of 12 acts, averaging 5 incidents per participant. Nearly half (49%) reported serious cases, while 42% said they had received threats directed at themselves or their families. Interviews showed that MPs distinguished between the "cost of doing politics" and behaviour they considered unacceptable, differentiating abusive messages from direct threats (James *et al.*, 2016).

Data from the 2017 United Kingdom general election candidate survey found that 32.7% of 1,495 respondents had experienced harassment, with party membership emerging as a key variable (Collignon & Rüdig, 2020). A 2018 study further revealed that out of 180 respondents, 53.4% faced online trolling on a daily basis, and 38.4% weekly (Akhtar & Morrison, 2019).

In New Zealand, a 2015 study reported that 87% of 102 MPs had experienced harassment, most often through letters and emails (68%) or social media (60%). Nearly half (48%) said they had received threats, and 15% reported physical assaults or threats of violence. Respondents noted that blogs, emails and social media had heightened their exposure, as well as that of their families, especially given the anonymity of offenders. A later survey of 54 MPs found that attacks had intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic and had continued to rise afterwards: 98% reported harassment on social media, including threats of physical violence (40%), sexual violence (14%), threats to family members (19%) and threats to staff (12%). Between 2014 and 2022, there were documented increases in physical threats (15%), malicious material (25%), inappropriate correspondence (28%) and inappropriate social media contact (36%) (Every-Palmer *et al.*, 2015; Every-Palmer *et al.*, 2024).

In Norway, a 2014 study showed that, of 95 respondents, 71% had experienced stalking and 70% had received threatening emails or letters. Stalking was defined as persistent, unwanted behaviour despite clear objections (Narud & Dahl, 2015). Subsequent research on members of the Norwegian government and parliament found that 82% of 82 participants had faced threats, improper interactions or hate comments on social media, with severe cases in 40% of instances. Online harassment rose sharply, from 37.8% in 2013 to 52.5% in 2017 (Bjørgo & Silkoset, 2018). A 2021 survey of 1,179 candidates further showed that nearly half had experienced some form of violence, mostly online, although 90% rejected the idea that it was a normal part of politics (Belschner *et al.*, 2023).

Most of this research focuses on the Global North, leaving gaps in knowledge about other regions, especially the Global South. Many studies also centre on individual offenders or those with untreated mental health conditions, overlooking the structural, symbolic and cultural dimensions of political violence. There is an urgent need for additional research in areas outside of English-speaking and Scandinavian nations to create a more comprehensive and globally pertinent understanding.

Political violence against parliamentarians is not new, but evidence suggests its severity, frequency and forms may be increasing. MPs are particularly vulnerable because of their visibility and direct contact with constituents in offices and parliamentary buildings and at public events – risks often compounded by inadequate security measures (Adams *et al.*, 2009). Violence is also more common during election campaigns and heated political debates (Koch *et al.*, 2025), while greater media exposure appears to increase the likelihood of threats and hate messages.

Increased frustration with, and distrust of, politicians

Research links this vulnerability to widespread frustration with, and distrust of, politicians. From the start, they are often seen as dishonest or manipulative, even when evidence contradicts such views. Swire-Thompson *et al.* (2020) found that correcting misinformation about US politicians reduced belief in falsehoods but did not change participants' negative feelings towards them.

Frustration arises when citizens' expectations clash with political decisions. Harrison (2020) identifies three dimensions: ideological, institutional and political. Ideological frustration tends to lead to disengagement, institutional frustration to anger, and the combination of political and institutional frustration to aggression.

Contemporary societies often privilege personal needs over collective goals, which can intensify frustration. Citizens may develop unrealistic expectations of what politicians should deliver for them individually, overlooking the representative role of balancing competing interests. When decisions fail to align with personal desires, disappointment can quickly turn hostile. This shrinks the space for deliberation and undermines the legitimacy of democratic institutions.

Social media dynamics further amplify these tensions. The Deputy Speaker of the House of Commons of the United Kingdom confirmed that abuse spikes when emotive issues are debated, and MPs who speak out on such issues often become targets. This points to a polarization effect and suggests that much online abuse is reactive (Akhtar & Morrison, 2019). In such environments, representatives are not only judged for their performance but also punished for visibility, voice and dissent – particularly when their views are seen as polarizing or controversial.

Affective polarization and political violence

An increasing body of evidence suggests that emotional polarization[3] and democratic backsliding[4] are escalating simultaneously across the globe. Researchers warn that growing polarization poses severe risks to democratic frameworks and open discourse (Dixit & Weibull, 2007). Elevated polarization complicates the process of consensus-building among political factions, transforming politics into a competitive process. In such cases, elected majorities may intend to consolidate power by undermining institutions and norms designed to uphold democratic values.

While this dynamic is widely acknowledged, debates persist about which forms of polarization have the most significant effects. Emotional polarization, in particular, often leads to extreme hostility towards opposing groups. People often perceive political adversaries as existential threats to the nation, democracy or a particular way of life. Affective polarization operates on both individual and interpersonal levels (Somer & McCoy, 2024).

Social identity theory suggests that heightened emotional polarization may result in increased support for violence, particularly when it crosses a critical threshold. However, limited research has experimentally examined the role of strong emotions towards opposing groups in fostering support for political violence. These studies define political violence broadly, encompassing both physical harm and symbolic injury.

When individuals perceive widespread acceptance or justification of political violence among their peers, social and moral constraints can weaken. This normalization creates a permissive environment, enabling those predisposed to violence to act on their impulses. The findings underscore how deep divisions can indirectly foster extreme behaviour, even if the majority do not endorse such actions.

Online violence and social media

The rise of digital communication has shifted the landscape of political violence from physical confrontation to online aggression. Rhetoric often acts as a catalyst for symbolic violence, reinforcing power relations and societal hierarchies. Language thus plays a pivotal role in enabling other forms of violence. Social media platforms amplify these dynamics, normalizing injustice and symbolic harm through abusive discourse. They not only exacerbate pre-existing issues – such as gender inequality and discrimination against women and minorities – but also generate new forms of harm (Recuero, 2024; Sosa Vivas, 2024).

Political violence on social media poses unique challenges for researchers and policymakers. The comprehensive data require advanced data mining and text-analysis tools, which often have limitations. Political discourse on social media may include vague language and obscure forceful assertions, reducing its global applicability. Research often examines limited periods, such as the weeks or months before elections, which can significantly affect behaviour and relationships.

Notwithstanding, studies on social media highlight structural factors, like increasing political polarization and fragmented political landscapes. The role of social media in polarization has been extensively debated in academic circles, with several studies exploring how these platforms create "echo chambers" – self-contained ecosystems where users are exposed primarily to content that reinforces their existing beliefs. These disjointed, personalized and specialized networks exacerbate divisions.

Pariser (2012) argues that individuals do not intentionally enter "echo chambers" but are influenced by external conditions that shape their engagement. Studies on online violence – mainly relying on automated tools to analyse abusive texts – have shown mixed results regarding its intensity and scope. For example, Ward and McLoughlin (2020) analysed 270,000 tweets sent over two months during the Brexit debate and found that 2.57% were abusive or hateful. Similarly, Van Sant *et al.* (2021) analysed abusive messages directed at Finnish Cabinet members during four months in 2020 and found 7% of the texts to be potentially harmful. A study of the 2022 Brazilian election showed that 3 out of every 100 tweets received by female candidates were misogynistic in nature (Koch *et al.*, 2025).

While the prevalence rates are not directly comparable, the findings offer critical insights. Exposure to abuse is pervasive, but its severity varies significantly among individuals. Specific events or debates involving parliamentarians often trigger a spike in incidents, which are closely associated with public discourse or media coverage.

The studies rely on automated tools to analyse abusive texts, focusing on prevalence rather than broader social impacts or individual perceptions. The scarcity of longitudinal studies and consistent definitions further complicates comparisons across diverse research. Addressing these gaps is crucial for a more profound understanding of political violence on social media.

Gendered violence and violence against historically disadvantaged groups

Krook & Restrepo Sanin (2019) argue that "bias against women in political roles – originating in structural violence, employing cultural violence, and resulting in symbolic violence – distinguishes this phenomenon from other forms of political violence" or from violence against political figures more broadly.

3 The process by which individuals or groups develop increasingly intense and opposing emotional reactions towards those with different beliefs, ideologies or group identities.

4 The gradual decline in the stability, quality or functioning of democratic institutions and practices.

Women and members of historically disadvantaged groups (HDGs) in politics often bear the heaviest burden of violence, shaped by intersecting systems of oppression such as sexism, racism and economic inequality. Political violence does not occur in neutral contexts: it reflects and reinforces existing power imbalances. Women may face gender-specific attacks, including threats of sexual assault or harassment, aimed at undermining their political participation. Similarly, marginalized groups experience both material and symbolic forms of violence, perpetuating cycles of exclusion and injustice. These disparities highlight the need for nuanced analyses of diverse experiences.

Violence against women in politics has become a major field of study over the past 15 years. Unlike earlier research, these studies consider cultural factors and the roles of gender, ethnicity and class, moving beyond a focus on individual perpetrators. Evidence remains mixed on whether women receive more abuse than men, but clearer on the nature of that abuse. Men are more often targeted for their political views, while women are attacked because they are women. A 2018 study of 180 MPs in the United Kingdom found that female respondents reported less online social media abuse overall than men yet faced a broader range of personal attacks and significantly higher levels of racial and sexual abuse. The impacts also followed gendered patterns (Akhtar & Morrison, 2019).

Further research shows that attacks on women in politics frequently take sexualized or sexist forms, including threats of sexual violence, body shaming, gender stereotyping, infantilization, accusations of moral corruption, and gender-based slurs. Even when hostility stems from political disagreements, the tone often becomes gendered or sexualized (Van Sant *et al.*, 2021; Sosa Vivas, 2024; Koch *et al.,* 2025). This can appear as "light-hearted" trolling through memes and jokes or escalate into coordinated "herd aggression" amplified by platform algorithms (Gurumurthy & Dasarathy, 2022). Gender-based political violence therefore has distinct aims, forms and consequences: to exclude women and non-heteronormative identities from the public sphere (Bardall *et al.*, 2020; Erikson *et al.*, 2021; Håkansson, 2024). Some scholars frame it as a continuum, stressing the lived experiences of victims across multiple forms of abuse (Bardall, 2011; Krook & Restrepo Sanin, 2019; Bjarnegård & Zetterberg, 2023).

The digital sphere reveals these dynamics starkly. Before the 2017 United Kingdom elections, Amnesty International found that female MPs of African and Asian descent received 35% more abusive tweets than their white peers, with nearly half directed at Diane Abbott, the country's first Black female MP (Dhrodia, 2017). In New Zealand, former prime minister Jacinda Ardern faced online vitriol at rates 50–90 times higher than other high-profile figures between 2019 and 2022, with 5,438 of 18,000 posts classified as angry, sexually explicit or toxic (Wilson, 2023). These incidents prompted the creation of Fixated Threat Assessment Centres (FTACs), designed both to monitor online abuse signalling potential threats to public figures and to improve support for individuals whose abusive behaviour was linked to mental health conditions (Barry-Walsh *et al.*, 2020).

The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) (2016) reported that 82% of 55 women MPs in a global study had experienced psychological harassment. In Ireland and Sweden, women politicians face higher rates of sexualized harassment than men (Erikson *et al.*, 2022; Buckley *et al.*, 2023). In Japan, a study of four prominent female politicians found that one third of messages received over four months contained negative remarks (Fuchs & Schäfer, 2020).

Amnesty International's later research (Dhrodia, 2017) confirmed the disproportionate abuse faced by Black and Asian female MPs in the United Kingdom, which harms well-being and discourages participation. Across Europe, 50% of young women – particularly those active in public life – report experiencing gender-based cyberviolence (European Parliament, 2024). Women in the United Kingdom are also 50% less comfortable than men in engaging in online political activity (Enock *et al.*, 2024). This gap threatens representative democracy, creating a chilling effect that reduces women's participation. Faced with persistent harassment, many women scale back their involvement or, in some cases, leave politics altogether (Barker & Jurasz, 2019; NDI, 2019; Sobieraj, 2020; Erikson *et al.*, 2021). Recent studies suggest that online intimidation, especially when gendered or sexist, can discourage women from pursuing political ambitions – an urgent area for further research (Vrielink & van der Pas, 2024).

Growing evidence underscores the importance of diverse representation for effective leadership, governance and social progress (IPU & UN Women, 2023). The effects of online violence on political participation have profound consequences for democracy and human rights. In practice, this harm is felt not only by elected politicians but also by their staff, who handle emails, letters and social media monitoring, and often accompany MPs in public. This raises critical questions about how such exposure shapes the efficacy, well-being and daily functioning of both MPs and their teams.

Impact on mental health and everyday functioning

Of 18 research papers on politicians' mental well-being, two thirds – 12 studies since 2016 – identified the negative impact of violence in its various forms (Smith *et al.*, 2024). These findings go beyond documenting exposure, showing how such violence affects daily work and behaviour. Clear links emerge between harassment and poorer mental health, as well as significant lifestyle changes: treatment for ill health (16%), increased home security (rising from 20% to 72% in 2022), reduced outings (12% to 40%) (Every-Palmer *et al.*, 2024), diverted attention, diminished quality of life, and even intentions to leave politics (one third of those surveyed) (Herrick & Thomas, 2024). Symptoms of psychological disorders have also been reported among MPs, mayors and other elected representatives (Smith *et al.*, 2024). The implications matter not only for affected individuals but also for the democratic functions their roles serve.

Studies highlight a range of negative psychological effects linked to both online and physical violence. Findings include mental stress in 62% of New Zealand MPs (Every-Palmer *et al.*, 2024), 22–33% of US mayors (Herrick & Thomas, 2024) and 46–80% of United Kingdom MPs following online abuse (Akhtar & Morrison, 2019). Reported symptoms include irritability or difficulties with concentration or sleep (40%); intrusive thoughts (18%) (Herrick & Franklin, 2019); and anxiety or fear (62%) (Bjørgo & Silkoset, 2018). Researchers found these symptoms consistent with post-traumatic stress (Nijdam *et al.*, 2010; Herrick & Thomas, 2024). Nearly 20% of victims reported lasting negative effects (Adams *et al.*, 2009).

Although experiences vary, recent studies show that only 8–16% of politicians seek professional health support. This does not mean that all others need clinical care, but it raises questions about the availability and uptake of psychological help. Some politicians show resilience, feeling emboldened by threats to continue their work. Yet this should not obscure the severe harm that exposure to violence and abuse can cause.

Stigma around mental health in politics is only beginning to fade. Some leaders, such as John Fetterman (United States), Andrew Robb (Australia) and Kjell Magne Bondevik (Norway) have received credit for speaking openly about their struggles. Still, many politicians are unwilling to seek help, let alone make their experiences public. Cultural expectations may differ across parliaments, but the risks of representatives "suffering in silence" without support remain serious – for both individual well-being and democratic functioning.

Present IPU study

This study has focused on key areas where further research would deepen understanding of political violence and guide public policy. Its five main contributions are as follows:

- Providing new evidence on how political violence affects all MPs, examining both shared and group-specific patterns for a fuller picture of the phenomenon
- Exploring the impact on marginalized groups – including racial minorities, people with disabilities, and LGBTQIA+ communities – whose experiences remain underresearched
- Incorporating perspectives from the Global South to build a more inclusive account of political violence across diverse sociocultural contexts
- Addressing challenges such as underreporting, normalization and intersectionality by refining survey methods and using multiple follow-ups to strengthen data collection
- Assessing how political violence affects democratic processes and parliamentary work, clarifying its broader consequences for governance and representation

As stigma around mental health in politics is only beginning to fade, many politicians are still unwilling to seek help – the risks of representatives "suffering in silence" without support remain serious. © Freepik

IV. Methodology

General objective

Investigate the extent to which political violence – online and offline – affects MPs worldwide.

Specific objectives

1. Measure the prevalence of different forms of political violence against MPs, both online and offline.
2. Identify the factors and conditions linked to such violence across countries, including gender, membership in HDGs, party affiliation (ruling versus opposition), age, political experience and other relevant variables.
3. Assess MPs' perceptions of the contexts that may intensify violence, such as election cycles, high-profile legislative debates and corruption cases.
4. Examine the impacts of violence on MPs' well-being, careers and decision-making processes.
5. Evaluate the existence and effectiveness of institutional mechanisms for addressing political violence against MPs.

Research approach

This study followed a primarily quantitative approach, using a structured, online, self-administered survey to measure the extent of online and offline violence experienced by parliamentarians.

To complement these data, the study also included a qualitative analysis of the political context in five selected national cases. Together, this mixed-methods design provides a fuller picture of the prevalence, nature and personal impacts of violence, while situating MPs' experiences within their broader political environments.

Research design

Type of study

The study is both descriptive and correlational. The descriptive component gathers baseline and contextual data, such as demographic profiles, details of parliamentary structure and composition, and existing research on political violence. Building on this foundation, the analysis then explores correlations between reported incidents of violence and political or demographic variables, including gender, age and membership in HDGs.

Data-collection instruments

The study relies primarily on a structured, online, self-administered survey of MPs in five selected countries. The questionnaire covered the following:

- Types of online violence experienced in the past year, including frequency, channels and non-State instigators
- Types of offline violence experienced in the past year, including frequency and non-State instigators
- Prevalence of non-State political violence targeting specific demographic groups
- Impacts of such violence on parliamentarians
- Coping mechanisms and institutional responses

For the contextual analysis, additional data were drawn from reliable external sources, including universities, public bodies, international organizations and civil society organizations.

Sampling methods

The survey was sent to all members of the national parliaments in five countries: Argentina, Benin, Italy, Malaysia and the Netherlands. These cases were selected to capture diverse political and regional contexts, based on the following criteria:

- **Diverse regions and languages**: The sample included two countries in Europe, one in French-speaking Africa, one in Latin America and one in Asia, representing various regions and official languages.
- **Diverse political systems**: The sample included both parliamentary and presidential systems.
- **Democratic indicators**: The aim was to include only countries classified as full or flawed democracies in the Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index. Where no suitable cases met these requirements alongside other criteria, hybrid regimes were selected as alternatives.
- **Absence of recent elections**: This criterion was applied to minimize the influence of electoral cycles and to allow for a clearer focus on MPs' experiences with violence.
- **Access to parliaments**: Cases were chosen where established contacts within the parliamentary system could facilitate responsiveness and cooperation from MPs.

The research targeted all MPs in the selected parliaments to build an overall picture of their experiences with political violence by the public. As the survey was self-administered, the sample consisted of voluntary responses, which may have introduced self-selection bias.

Data-collection process

The survey was distributed by email, with data collected between November 2024 and August 2025. Follow-up reminders were employed to improve response rates. The questionnaire was designed to be completed online in under five minutes.

Ethical considerations

Respondents' personal information was used solely for follow-up purposes and to identify potential duplicate responses. Anonymity was fully maintained throughout the analysis and in the publication of results.

Limitations

Like all research, this study has methodological limitations. Definitions are critical, as they determine which activities are included in, or excluded from, the concept of violence. Depending on the criteria, the measured extent of political violence may expand or contract, shaping the results.

A second limitation concerns secondary sources. While relying on well-regarded, peer-reviewed journals (mostly in the top 25% of academic rankings) ensures methodological rigour, it risks excluding voices from the Global South and women researchers, who remain underrepresented in these publications.

Case selection also imposes restrictions. The chosen national examples provide substantiation but do not represent entire regions. Moreover, although a comparative method was applied, substantial differences in social and political contexts may influence outcomes and limit generalizations across cases.

The survey data were subject to self-selection bias, since participation depended on MPs' willingness and availability. This trade-off was necessary to gather data in environments where political violence is often underreported or hard to measure. Like most surveys on sensitive issues, the results reflect respondents' subjective impressions. They do not capture violence as an objective reality but rather as it is perceived and experienced by MPs.

Perceptions vary by individual background, political stance and social context. As Krook and Restrepo Sanin (2016) note, cultures may employ different techniques to discipline women and minority groups, assigning varied significance to these behaviours and shaping their normalization. What one MP considers harassment or bullying may not be viewed as such by another, affecting both interpretation and comparability across time and place.

Another limitation is that newer MPs – especially women and individuals from underrepresented groups – may not yet have encountered or recognized political violence or may underreport it to "earn" legitimacy and avoid perceptions of weakness. Similarly, some respondents may downplay or exaggerate experiences to conform to social norms, either minimizing victimization or overstating resilience.

The study also relies on cross-sectional data, capturing experiences at one point in time. This restricts the ability to track changes in violence over time or to assess causal relationships.

To strengthen the statistical analysis, Fisher's exact tests were performed alongside all chi-square tests, addressing small subgroup sizes and reducing the risk of spurious correlations.

Despite these constraints, the study retains a degree of generalizability: its findings can be cautiously extended to larger populations, particularly in similar institutional contexts. Its methodological design also supports replicability, enabling future comparison studies using the same tools and frameworks.

Survey

This study aimed to collect structured data on how MPs face political violence, both online and offline, and how they react to it. It examined who is targeted, how violence emerges, its impact on personal and professional life, and if it results in behavioural changes such as decreased public involvement, altered voting habits or retreat from political settings. Emotional outcomes such as stress, worry and depression were also investigated. These features were related to larger concerns about the normalization of violence and its consequences for democratic participation and institutional confidence.

To identify patterns and better understand the distribution of political violence, the survey included key sociodemographic variables such as age, gender, years in politics, constituency type and self-identification with HDGs. Based on social identity theory and enriched by an intersectional perspective, this paradigm allows the analysis to explore how overlapping social identities might increase susceptibility to violence as a result of structural inequities.

A mixed-methods approach was adopted. Quantitative questions measured the frequency and types of violence, whereas open-ended questions allowed MPs to describe individual events in their words. This method blended statistical analysis with nuanced, contextualized observations. MPs were also asked if their parliaments had developed internal channels for reporting acts of intimidation and how successful such systems were in practice. Strong ethical precautions were in place throughout the survey design and execution process. Respondents participated anonymously, and data gathering followed confidentiality and care norms, considering the sensitivity of the issue and the possible hazards of exposing personal experiences of violence.

Glossary

The following variables were included in the survey and analysis to identify patterns in MPs' experiences of political violence. Applied across all case studies with a cross-sectional approach, they help detect correlations and clarify how violence affects different groups:

- **Gender**: Assesses whether violence disproportionately affects women or men, capturing gender-specific dynamics and differentiated impacts based on gender identity.
- **Age**: Examines whether younger or older MPs are more frequently targeted, highlighting potential generational patterns.
- **Years in politics**: Measures total time in political life, regardless of position, to test whether longer exposure correlates with higher, lower or different experiences of violence.
- **Constituency type (urban versus rural)**: Explores whether demographic and geographic characteristics of constituencies influence the type, frequency or intensity of violence.
- **Belonging to HDGs**: Captures MPs' self-identification with marginalized groups – based on gender, sexual orientation or identity, race, ethnicity, religion, disability, socioeconomic background, or other factors – to examine whether intersecting discrimination shapes prevalence or forms of violence.
- **Perpetrators of violence**: Identifies the actors responsible, including private individuals (identified or anonymous), political parties, media, businesses, trade unions and civil society organizations. State actors, public officials and parliamentary peers were excluded, as the focus was on public (non-institutional) violence.
- **Normalization of violence**: Measured through agreement with the statement "violence is the cost of doing politics", to test whether MPs see it as an accepted or inevitable part of political life.
- **Perceived increase in violence**: Asks whether MPs believe violence has increased in recent years. The question was intentionally broad, without specifying types, actors or platforms, to capture general perceptions of change.
- **Contexts for violence**: Identifies political, social or institutional contexts – and specific issues – that may trigger or intensify violence, assessed through structured multiple-choice questions.
- **Self-restriction**: Records whether MPs have modified or limited their political behaviour owing to violence or fear of violence (e.g. avoiding media, reducing public appearances, deactivating social media, refraining from candidacy, altering votes or resigning).
- **Parliamentary response**: Evaluates whether internal mechanisms exist within parliaments to report and address intimidation or violence, both online and offline.

V. Analysis of results

© Parliament of Argentina

Argentina

1. Context

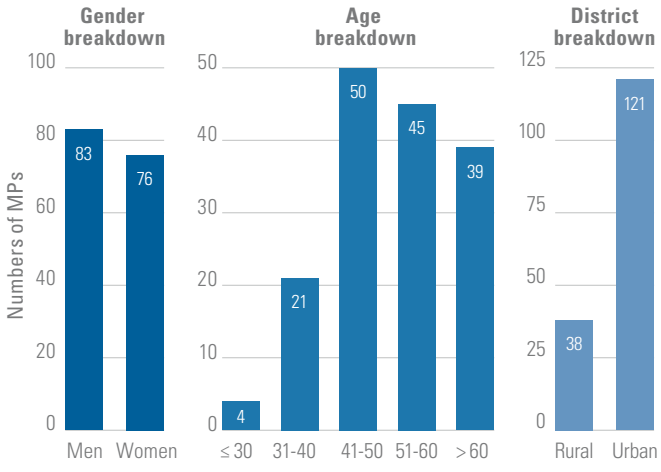
After seven years under a violent civil-military dictatorship, Argentina restored democracy in 1983 and has since maintained a stable democratic tradition. Elections are held freely, openly and mandatorily every two years, with consistently high participation rates. In the 2023 presidential election, turnout reached 77.6%. Since the democratic transition, elections have taken place in a transparent environment, with no recorded cases of fraud. The political spectrum is broad, with more than 50 parties competing through diverse alliances.

The Chamber of Deputies of Argentina is composed of members representing each province plus the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires, with four-year terms and staggered renewal of half of the seats every two years. In the Senate, each province and the Autonomous City are represented by three members each – two from the majority and one from the minority – elected by popular vote. Senators serve six-year terms, with one third of the chamber renewed every two years on a rotating basis.

2. Survey results

The survey was carried out between December 2024 and January 2025 among all members of the National Congress, with a response rate of 48.3% (159 out of 329). Of those who participated, 83 were men (44%) and 76 were women (53%). Most respondents were between 41 and 60 years old, and 121 represented urban districts.

Figure 1. Argentina - Sample breakdown

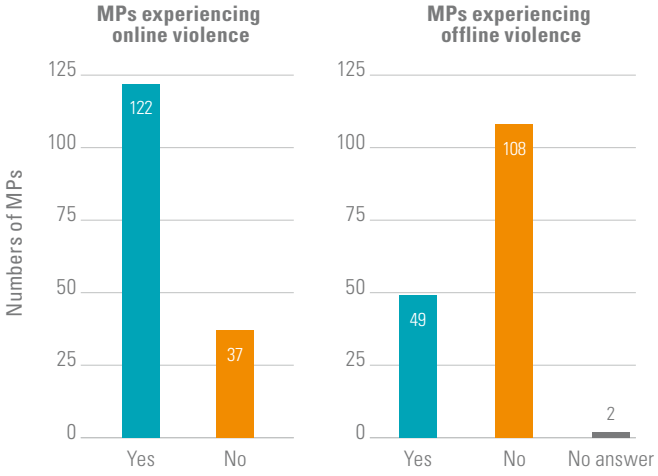


Source: IPU, 2024

a. Incidence of violence in the last year

Overall, 76.7% of respondents (122 out of 159) reported experiencing violence online or through social media, compared with 30.8% who said they had faced violence in physical settings.

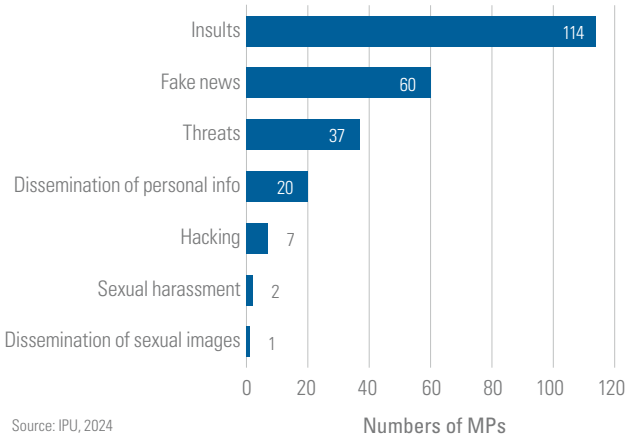
Figure 2. MPs experiencing violence in the last year



Source: IPU, 2024

The most common form of online violence reported in the past year was insults (71.6%), followed by the spread of fake news (37.7%), threats (23.2%), publication of personal information (12.5%), hacking (4.4%), sexual harassment (1.2%) and the circulation of sexually explicit images (0.6%). Among the 122 affected MPs, 67% faced at least one episode per month in most months, 27% experienced incidents weekly and 5.7% reported attacks on a near-daily basis.

Figure 3. Type of online violence experienced by MPs

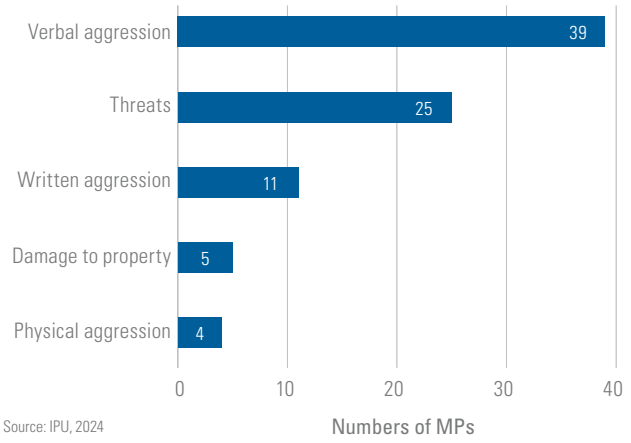


Source: IPU, 2024

"Generally, insults happen on social media by people who repeat phrases used by the president himself."

In physical spaces, the most common form of offline violence was verbal aggression (24.5%), followed by threats (16.3%), written attacks (6.9%), property damage (3.1%), and physical assaults (2.5%). In nearly all cases (98%), those affected reported experiencing about one incident per month for most months.

Figure 4. Type of offline violence experienced by MPs



Source: IPU, 2024

"When leaving a restaurant, we were violently harassed by a group of other customers."

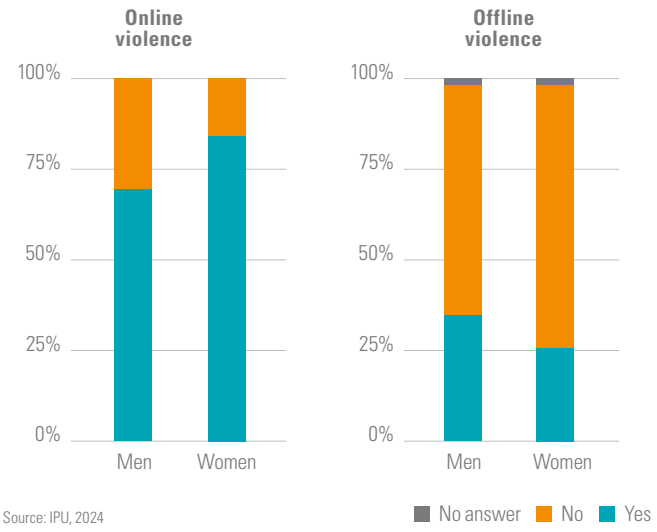
The survey also revealed that many parliamentarians experienced multiple forms of violence at the same time. Among the 122 who faced online abuse, 76 (62%) reported two or more types. Similarly, half of those exposed to offline violence endured more than one form over the past year. In addition, 45 respondents reported experiencing both online and offline violence.

a.1. Disaggregated results

- **Gender**

When comparing the experiences of men and women separately, women reported experiencing more online violence, while men reported experiencing more offline violence. In this sense, 82% of the women surveyed reported suffering violence through social media or virtual channels, whereas for men this percentage dropped to 69.8%. On the other hand, when analysing their experiences in the physical world, 26.6% of the women surveyed reported having suffered offline violence, while the percentage rose to 35.3% for men.

Figure 5. MPs experiencing violence, by gender

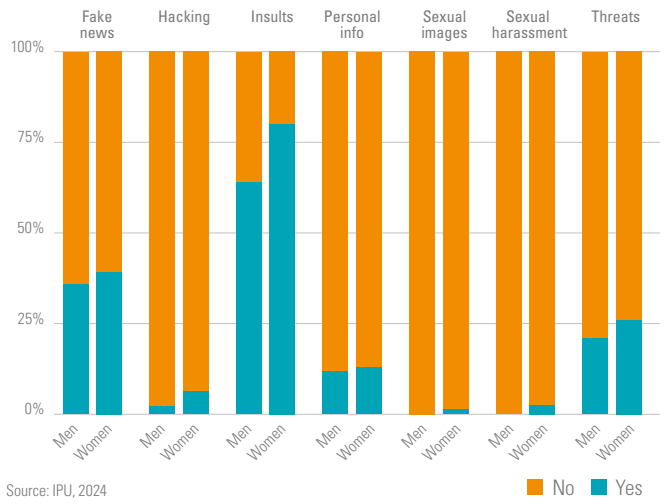


Source: IPU, 2024

In both groups, the most common forms of online aggression were insults, false news, threats and the disclosure of personal information. However, sexual harassment and the sharing of sexual images appeared to affect women more than men.

"For years I have suffered harassment with personal issues, lies and smears that resulted in a permanent consequence in my life. Political violence was and is a constant in my career."

Figure 6. Types of online violence, by gender of the MP

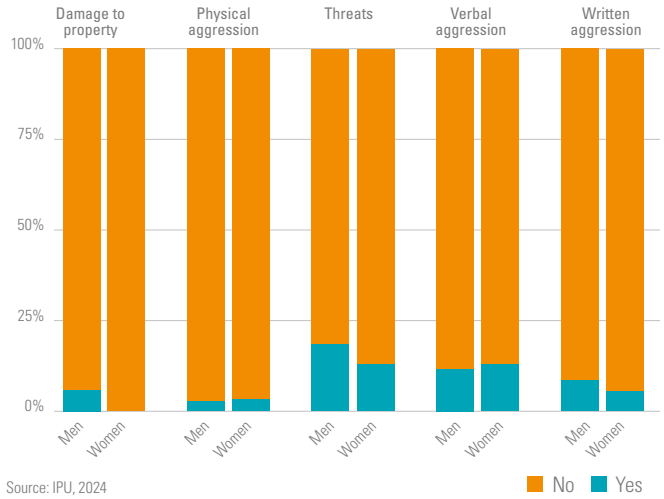


Source: IPU, 2024

In the physical environment, respondents reported similar levels of verbal aggression, threats, written aggression and physical aggression. Property damage, however, appeared to affect only men.

"In the 2015 elections, someone left me a bullet with the initials of my name."

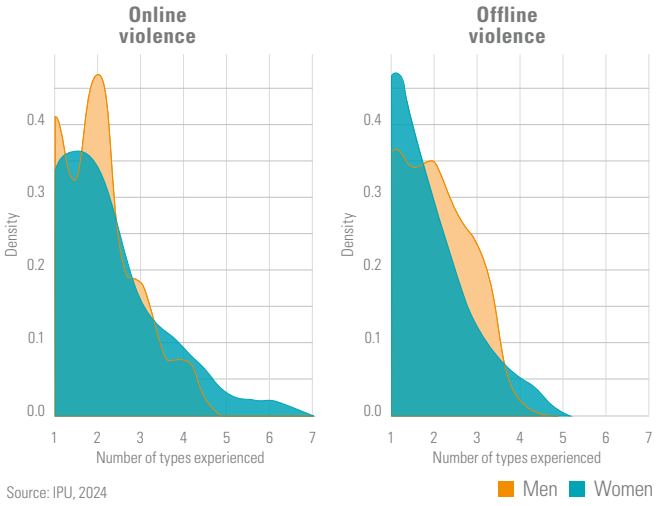
Figure 7. Types of offline violence, by gender of the MP



Source: IPU, 2024

An examination of the overlap between different forms of violence over the past year shows a recurring pattern. Both men and women reported experiencing one or two types of online violence, and some reported three or four. Notably, only women reported facing as many as five or six forms concurrently.

Figure 8. Coexistence of different types of violence, by gender



Source: IPU, 2024

"During the abortion debate, I was threatened on Twitter. They published my home address and accused me of being a murderer."

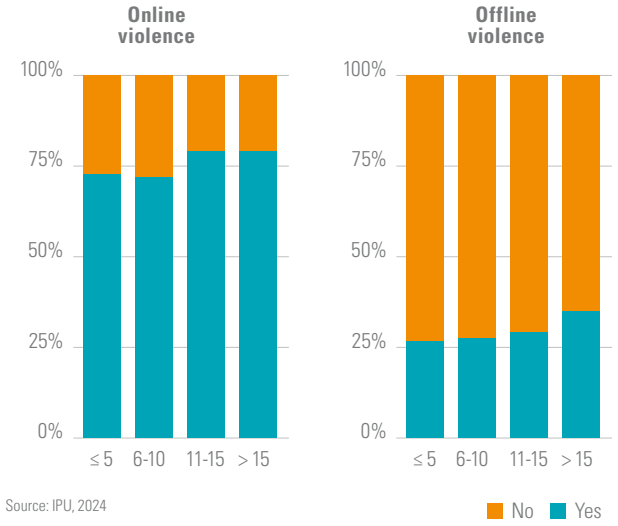
A Fisher's exact test was conducted to examine the relationship between gender and experiences of violence. The results showed a statistically significant association for online violence ($p = 0.0373$), indicating that women in this sample were more likely than men to experience this type of violence. The odds ratio ($OR = 0.43$) shows that the odds of experiencing online violence were more than twice as high for women as for men. This points to a substantial gendered pattern that warrants further investigation. In contrast, no statistically significant relationship was found for offline violence ($p = 0.3754$), suggesting that gender may not be a key factor shaping experiences of offline violence in this context.

- **Years in politics and age**

Among respondents, 25.7% reported having 5 years or less of political experience, 15.7% between 6 and 10 years, 18.2% between 11 and 15 years, and 40.2% more than 15 years.

As the following graph illustrates, the impact of both online and offline violence is fairly evenly distributed across these categories. However, when focusing on offline violence over the past year, a slight increase appears as political tenure lengthens.

Figure 9. MPs experiencing violence, by their years in politics

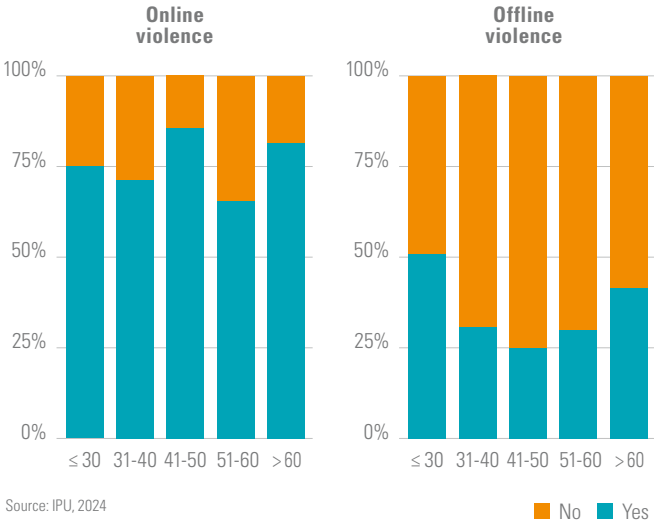


Source: IPU, 2024

A Fisher's exact test was performed to explore the association between years in politics and experiences of violence. No statistically significant associations were found between years in politics and experiences of either online (p = 0.7177) or offline violence (p = 0.8520), suggesting that political experience does not appear to influence exposure to violence in this sample.

As previously indicated, 84.2% of the people surveyed were over 40 years of age (31.4% between 41 and 50, 28.3% between 51 and 60, and 24.5% over 60).

Figure 10. MPs experiencing violence, by age group

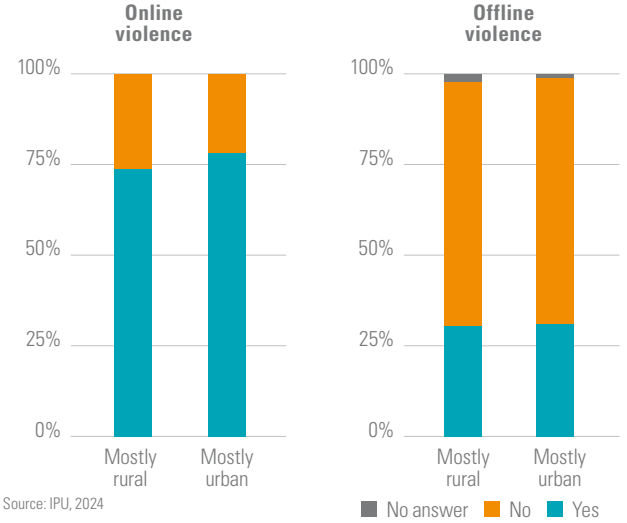


Source: IPU, 2024

A Fisher's exact test examining the relationship between age and experiences of violence did not yield statistically significant results for either form of violence. For online violence, the p-value was 0.0979, falling just above the conventional threshold for significance and suggesting a potential association worth exploring further. For offline violence, the result was clearly non-significant (p = 0.4028), indicating no meaningful relationship in this case. Overall, age does not show a clear statistical association with experiences of violence in this sample, although the slightly lower p-value for online violence may point to patterns worth exploring in future research.

- **Urban and rural districts**

Figure 11. MPs experiencing violence, by type of district



Source: IPU, 2024

Seventy-six per cent of respondents indicated that they represented predominantly rural districts. However, the data show little to no correlation between the type of district represented and the likelihood of experiencing violence.

The Fisher's exact test revealed no significant relationship between the type of district (urban versus rural) and experiences of violence. For online violence, the p-value was 0.6574, and for offline violence, it was 0.8347, indicating that geographic constituency does not play a determining role in the reported exposure to violence.

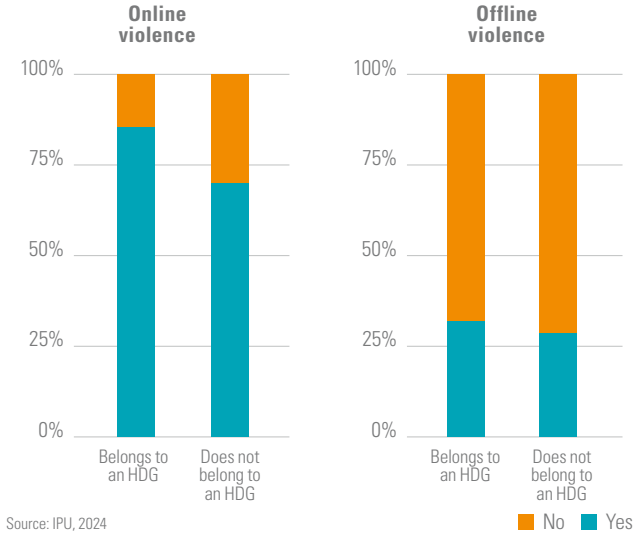
- **Belonging to HDGs**

A total of 31.4% of respondents said they considered themselves part of one or more HDGs, while 64.1% said they did not. The remaining 4.4% did not respond.

Among those who identified as belonging to HDGs, 86.7% reported experiencing some form of online violence, compared to 70.5% of those who did not make such an identification. For offline violence, the figures were 33.9% and 28.7%, respectively.

"As my trajectory as an LGBTIQ+ activist became popular, and as an openly gay man, the attacks shifted to accusations of paedophilia, threats of police raids on my home and accusations of possession of child pornography."

Figure 12. Violence against MPs from historically disadvantaged groups



Source: IPU, 2024

A statistically significant relationship was found between belonging to an HDG and experiences of online violence (p = 0.0446), indicating that members of these groups are more likely to be targeted in digital spaces. The odds ratio (OR = 2.54) suggests that the odds of experiencing online violence were more than twice as high for individuals from HDGs compared to others in the sample. No significant association was found for offline violence (p = 0.7079), suggesting that this disparity is particularly pronounced in online contexts.

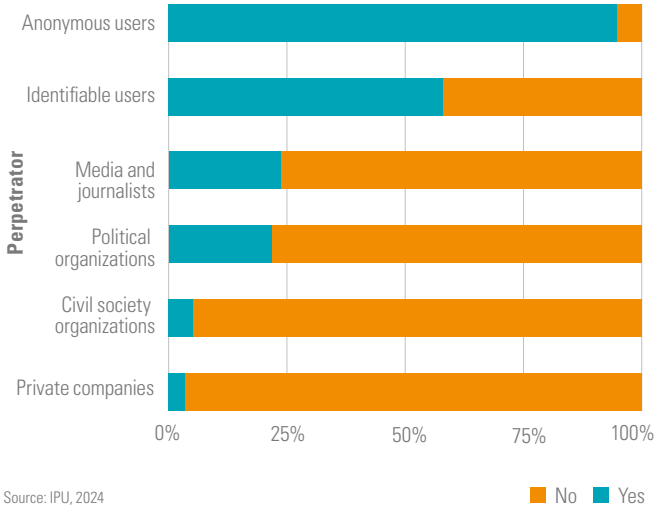
"I am the target of misogynistic insults on social media."

a.2. Who is perpetrating the violence?

In cases of online violence, respondents reported that the main forms – insults, the spread of false news, and threats – came primarily from anonymous users, identifiable individuals and the media.

"I reported a libertarian supporter troll who insulted me in a very hurtful way and repeatedly made death threats on social media."

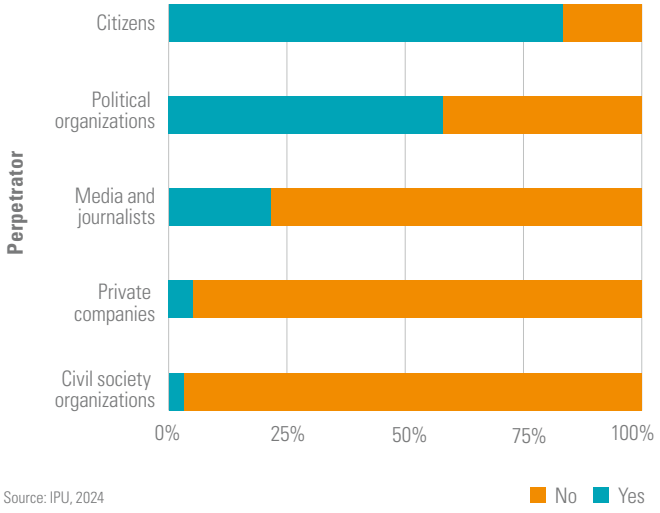
Figure 13. Perpetrators of online violence



Source: IPU, 2024

In cases of offline violence, incidents were reported mainly as coming from citizens and political organizations, though respondents also mentioned the media, private companies and civil society organizations.

Figure 14. Perpetrators of offline violence



Source: IPU, 2024

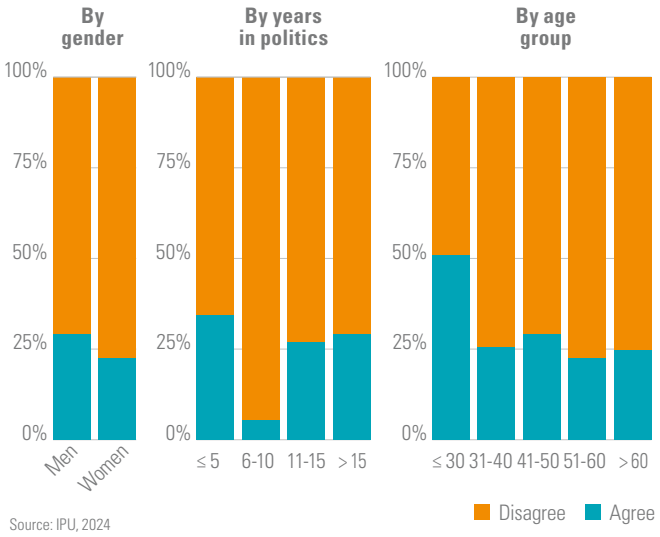
b. Perceptions about violence

b.1. Normalization of violence

According to the results, most respondents disagreed with the phrase "violence is the cost of doing politics". A total of 64.7% rejected the statement, 22.6% agreed with it, 8.1% were unsure and 4.4% did not answer.

When disaggregated by gender, years in politics and age, some notable patterns appear. Gender differences are minimal, but MPs with 6 to 10 years of experience were the most likely to disagree with the statement. By contrast, the youngest group – those under 30 – were more inclined to believe that violence is an inherent part of political life.

Figure 15. Violence is a cost of doing politics

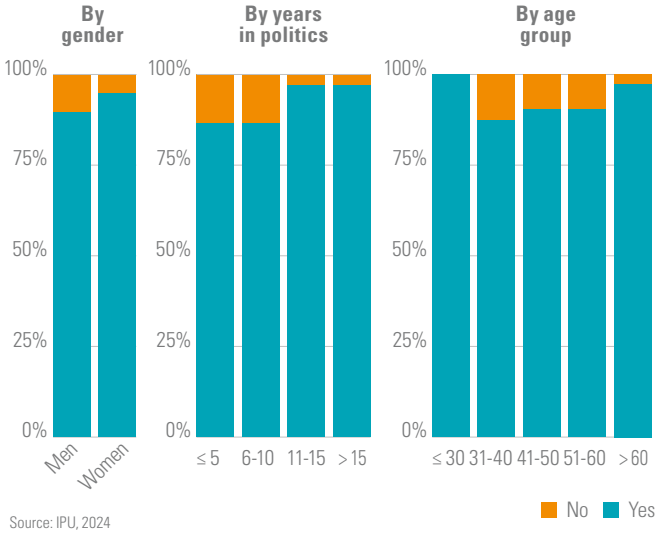


Source: IPU, 2024

b.2. Increase in violence

A total of 78.6% of respondents said they believed violence had increased in the past five years, 6.9% said it had not, and 10% were unsure. The remaining 4.4% did not respond.

Figure 16. Perception of a rise of violence in the last five years



Source: IPU, 2024

The disaggregated analysis in Figure 16 focuses on those who answered "yes" or "no". The graphs show a balanced perception of rising violence across the gender and years-in-politics categories. However, differences emerge when looking at age: respondents under 30 were more likely to perceive an increase in violence.

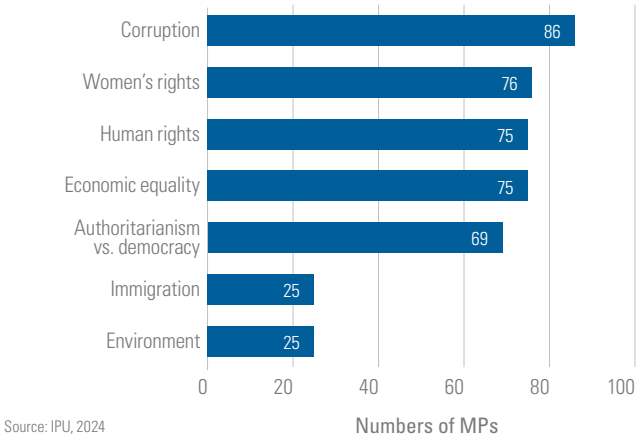
b.3. Contexts and topics that favour violence

Most respondents said violence tends to rise when certain laws are debated (81.7%), during corruption scandals (45.2%), and as elections approach (42.7%). Only 5% believed the increase was unrelated to specific events, and 2.5% did not respond.

"I suffered violence during the Bases Law debate. It was chaotic and very violent. Organized groups created a lot of fear".

The issues most likely to trigger violence include corruption, women's rights, human rights, economic equality, authoritarianism versus democracy, migration, and the environment.

Figure 17. Perceptions of issues triggering violence



Source: IPU, 2024

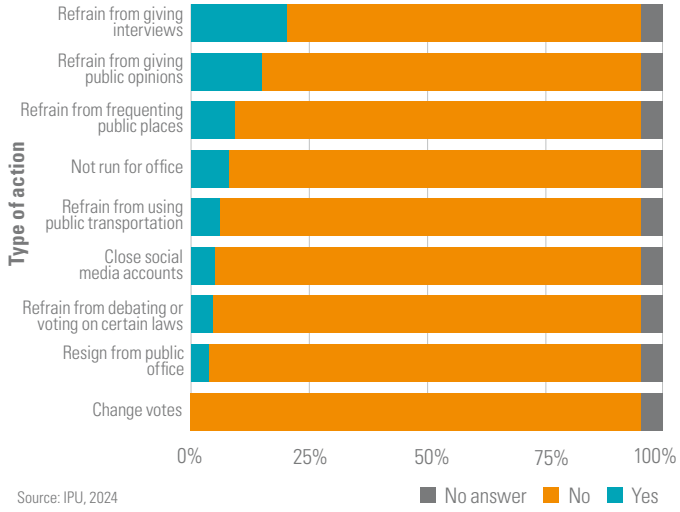
"For my vote on university funding, I was threatened and attacked through social media and in person by university groups, political and feminist organizations, university authorities and professors."

c. Personal impacts of violence

c.1. Self-restrictions

When MPs were asked whether, as a result of violence, they had considered refraining from expressing opinions in public, giving interviews, debating or voting on laws, or frequenting public spaces or transport services, or whether they had considered closing social media accounts, changing their vote or resigning from office, 38.3% said they had considered one or more of these actions. Among this group, 20% reported avoiding interviews, 15% refraining from expressing opinions in public and 9.4% avoiding public places.

Figure 18. Have you considered these actions?



Source: IPU, 2024

c.2. Violence against family members and friends

Of those surveyed, 30.5% reported episodes of violence against family or friends, while 69.5% said they had not experienced such episodes.

"The President's office included me on a list of 'traitors to the Argentine people' for voting against three subsections of a law. That ended up in a scrimmage through social media that even reached my wife."

d. Mental health

The proportion of Argentinian MPs responding to the mental health and well-being questions (48 out of 160) is too small to allow for conclusions on prevalence. However, over half of these respondents (25 out of 48; 52.1%) reported that violence – online or offline – had negatively affected their mental health and overall well-being. Of these MPs, 44% (11 out of 25) had sought professional help.

No statistically significant association was found between online violence and reported impact on mental health. By contrast, such an association was observed for offline violence: 56% (14 out of 25) of those who had experienced it reported impaired well-being, compared with 26% (6 out of 23) who had not ($p = 0.036$). MPs who reported offline violence against family or friends also showed higher rates of a negative impact on well-being (17 out of 25; 68%) than those whose families had not been targeted (11 out of 23; 48%), although this pattern was not statistically significant.

Links between mental health impacts, political behaviour and daily routine

Three of the 25 MPs who reported negative effects on well-being had considered resigning, compared with none of those whose well-being was unaffected. Twenty per cent (5 out of 25) had considered refraining from debates or votes on certain laws, compared with none of the unaffected MPs – a finding approaching statistical significance ($p = 0.051$). Nearly half (48%, 12 out of 25) also considered refraining from giving public opinions, compared with 30.4% (7 out of 23) of those not reporting a negative impact on well-being.

Violence also appeared to affect daily activities. Forty per cent (10 out of 25) of MPs who reported negative effects on well-being avoided public places, compared with 13% (3 out of 20) of those whose well-being was unaffected (this association approached statistical significance; $p = 0.052$). Thirty-six per cent (9 out of 25) of MPs with impaired well-being avoided public transport, compared with only 4.3% (1 out of 23) of unaffected MPs ($p = 0.011$).

Although the number of MPs answering these questions was relatively small, the analysis suggests clear links between offline violence and both psychological distress and behavioural changes. The findings point not only to serious consequences for individuals and their families, but also to broader implications for parliamentary functioning. They highlight complex relationships between violence, well-being and job performance that have so far received limited attention in the research literature.

e. Findings

This study analyses political violence by the public against MPs in Argentina, based on a 48.3% response rate (159 out of 329). Findings show that online violence is widespread and recurrent: 76.7% of respondents reported experiencing it, mainly in the form of insults, false information and threats. Offline violence, though less frequent (30.8%), remains significant, with verbal attacks and threats being the most common forms.

Patterns of violence show clear gendered differences. Women reported higher exposure to online violence (82% versus 69.8%) and were the only group to report five or more concurrent types, including sexual harassment and sexualized content. Men, by contrast, reported slightly more offline violence. Fisher's exact test confirmed a statistically significant association between gender and online violence ($p = 0.0373$), with women more than twice as likely as men to experience it. No significant relationship was found for offline violence ($p = 0.3754$).

Online violence also showed a statistically significant correlation with self-identified membership of HDGs (gender, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status or sexual identity). Among these MPs, 86.7% reported online aggression, compared with 70.5% of those not identifying as such. No such correlation was observed for offline violence. These results highlight the disproportionate exposure faced by marginalized identities in politics.

No significant associations were found with age or years in politics, or with whether districts were urban or rural. This suggests that exposure to violence in Argentina transcends demographic or geographic boundaries, being shaped instead by context, discourse and polarization. Age, however, approached significance for online violence ($p = 0.0979$), pointing to a potential trend worth further study.

Respondents identified online perpetrators mainly as anonymous or identifiable individuals and media outlets, while offline violence was often linked to citizens and political groups. Many MPs directly connected these assaults to the hostile political climate fostered by the executive branch, noting that antagonistic remarks from senior officials, including the president, were followed by waves of online harassment. Debates on issues such as abortion, government spending and corruption were cited as particular triggers.

Despite the frequency of violence, most MPs (64.7%) rejected the notion that it is simply "the cost of doing politics." Still, 38.3% said they had changed their behaviour – avoiding interviews, public appearances or public transport – and about one third reported that family members or close associates had also been targeted.

Cultural and political dynamics play a key role in shaping both the execution and perception of violence. In Argentina, a strong democratic tradition, in place since 1983, now coexists with an increasingly polarized public debate. The personalization of political conflict, combined with confrontational language from senior officials, has shifted the boundaries of acceptable conduct. At the same time, cultural tolerance for heated public discourse blurs the line between confrontation and violence – especially online – making it harder to recognize abuses, particularly against marginalized or dissenting voices.

It is important to acknowledge the study's limitations. While the overall sample allows for comparative analysis, statistical power is weaker in smaller subgroups, such as young MPs or those who did not report violence by State actors or fellow lawmakers. The methodological focus on public violence also risks overlooking forms of violence occurring within parliament itself.

Overall, the findings show that political violence in Argentina is widespread and increasingly normalized, particularly in digital spaces, and often reinforced by government discourse. While statistical associations have limits, MPs' lived experiences reveal concerning trends. The study underscores the need to examine the long-term effects of such violence, the role of political leaders in legitimizing it, and its impact on how MPs and parliament function in the face of ongoing intimidation.

Based on the survey conducted in Benin between December 2024 and January 2025, 7 out of 10 MPs experienced at least one form of violence. © Yanick Folly/AFP

Benin

1. Context

Since its democratic transition in the early 1990s, Benin has been regarded as one of West Africa's most stable democracies, organizing regular general elections since 1991. However, in December 2025 the country experienced a serious political/military crisis when an attempted coup d'état briefly unsettled the constitutional order before being thwarted, reflecting deeper strains in the political landscape, even as elections remained scheduled under the constitutional calendar.

According to Afrobarometer (2023), nearly 79% of Beninese citizens express a preference for democracy over other forms of government, reflecting strong societal support for democratic institutions.

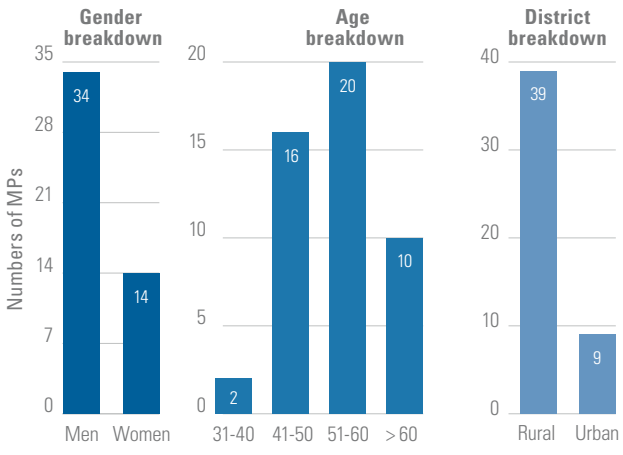
Beninese society is highly diverse, encompassing more than 50 ethnic groups (Minority Rights Group, 2018). Unlike in other West African states, no single group dominates national politics, and ethnic and religious divisions have historically been managed peacefully. However, regional disparities remain sharp between a wealthier, densely populated south and a less developed north.

Gender-based violence illustrates further social complexities. Nearly 80% of respondents believe it is uncommon in their communities, yet about 30% of women aged 15–49 report having experienced violence in their lifetimes (Afrobarometer, 2024).

2. Survey results

The survey was carried out between December 2024 and January 2025 among all members of the National Assembly, achieving a response rate of 44% (48 out of 109). Of the respondents, 14 were women and 34 were men, corresponding to gender shares of 29.17% and 70.83%, respectively. Regarding age distribution, 95.8% were over 40 years old, while 81% represented predominantly rural constituencies.

Figure 19. Benin - Sample breakdown

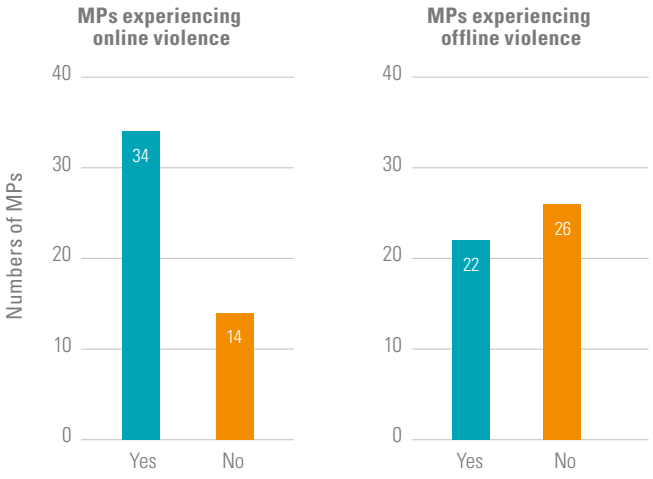


Source: IPU, 2024

a. Incidence of violence in the last year

The results indicate that 7 out of 10 MPs experienced at least one form of violence in the past year. Specifically, 70.8% of respondents (34 out of 48) reported incidents of online or digital violence, while 45.8% (22 respondents) reported experiencing offline or physical violence.

Figure 20. MPs experiencing violence in the last year

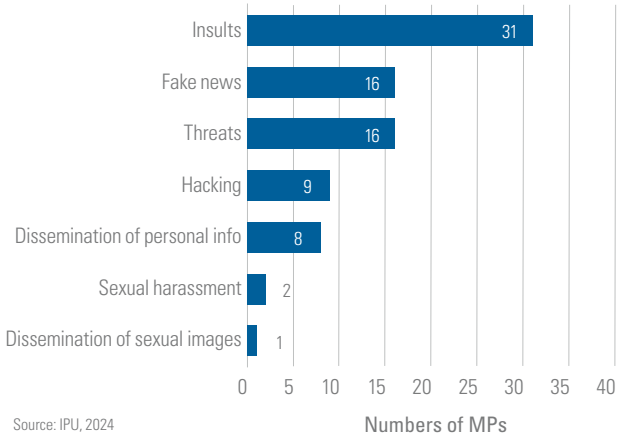


Source: IPU, 2024

"Hateful militants proliferate insults on social networks."

In the digital sphere, insults and hate speech emerged as the most common forms of violence in the past year, reported by 64.5% of respondents. Threats and the spread of false news followed (both at 33.3%), alongside hacking of personal accounts (18.7%) and the dissemination of personal information (16.6%). Less frequent, though still significant, were cases of sexual harassment (4.1%) and the circulation of sexually explicit images (2%). Notably, most affected MPs (30 out of 34) reported experiencing at least one episode per month during the majority of months, underscoring the sustained and repetitive nature of online abuse.

Figure 21. Type of online violence experienced by MPs

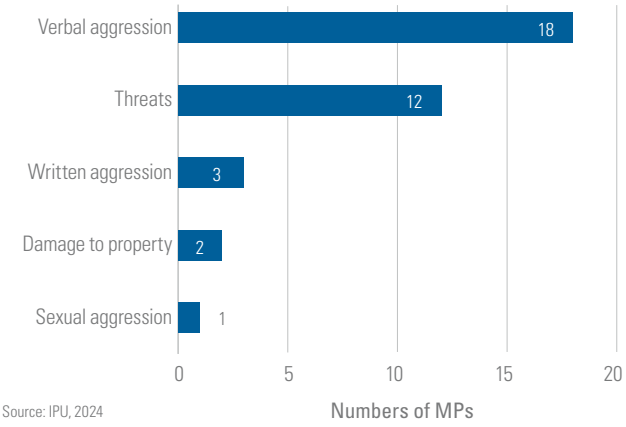


Source: IPU, 2024

"I was the victim of violence through the publication of headlines in online newspapers in the run-up to the legislative elections and after my installation."

In the physical environment, verbal aggression was the most common form of violence in the past year, reported by 37.5% of respondents. Threats followed (25%), alongside written aggressions (6.2%), damage to property (4%) and isolated cases of sexual aggression (2%). No respondent reported being physically assaulted. As with online abuse, these incidents were not sporadic: 19 of the 22 MPs who experienced violence indicated that it occurred at least once per month in most months, pointing to a sustained pattern of hostility in offline settings.

Figure 22. Type of offline violence experienced by MPs



Source: IPU, 2024

The survey also revealed that MPs were often subjected to multiple forms of violence at the same time. Among the 34 respondents who faced online abuse, 23 reported experiencing two or more different modalities. More than half of those exposed to offline violence likewise endured multiple types of aggression over the past year. Notably, 22 respondents indicated that they had experienced both online and offline violence, underscoring the compounded and overlapping nature of these threats.

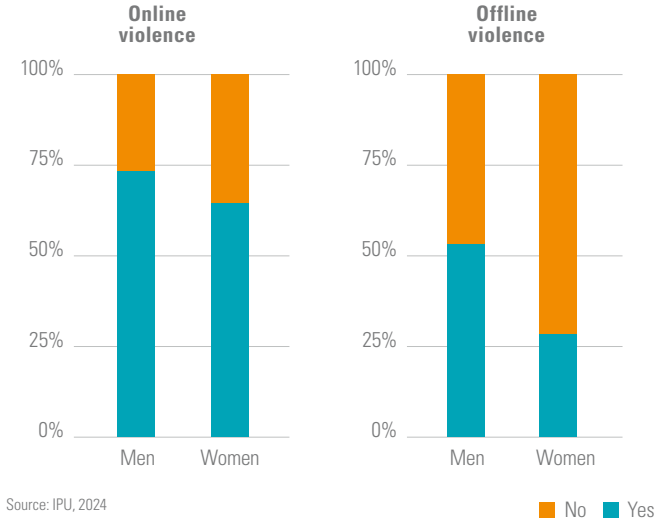
a.1. Disaggregated results

- **Gender**

The 2023 legislative elections were the first to apply the gender quota of 24 seats, which increased women's representation in the National Assembly from 6 to 29 MPs.

Survey results show that the proportion of women reporting experiences of violence is somewhat lower than that of men. Sixty-four per cent of female respondents reported suffering online violence, compared with 73.5% of male respondents. Although these findings contrast with broader global trends, where women often face more targeted and gendered attacks, they highlight the need to interpret results within the specific institutional and social context of Benin.

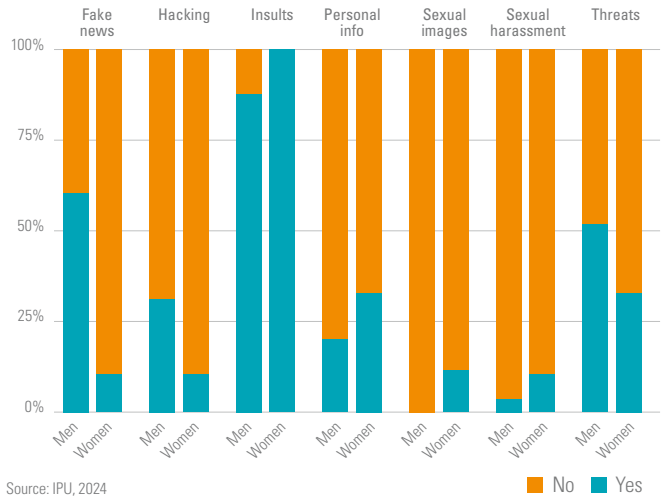
Figure 23. MPs experiencing violence, by gender



Source: IPU, 2024

In turn, 71% of surveyed women reported not experiencing physical violence, compared to only 47% of men. This result aligns with other studies showing that men in politics face higher levels of physical violence than women.

Figure 24. Types of online violence, by gender of the MP

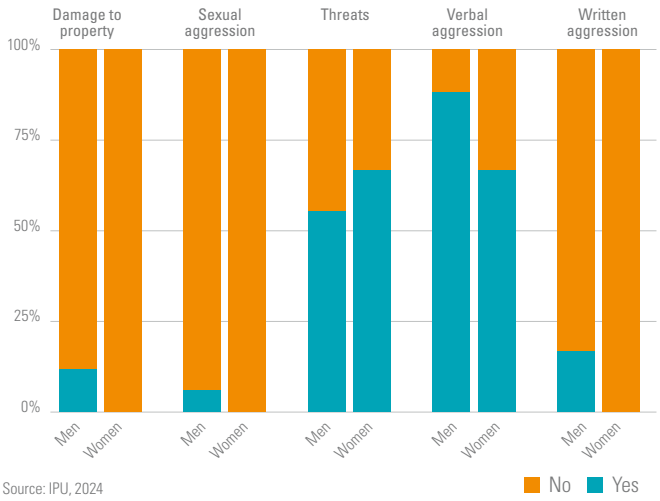


Source: IPU, 2024

"I was insulted after I called for better representation of women on communal councils. There were days of attacks on social networks."

In both settings, the most common forms of violence are insults, verbal abuse and threats. The distribution is fairly even across categories, except for the spread of fake news online, which appears to have affected male parliamentarians more than their female counterparts.

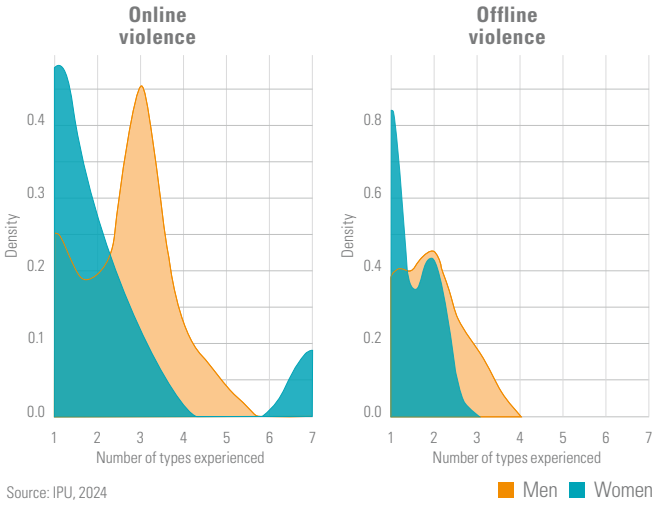
Figure 25. Types of offline violence, by gender of the MP



Source: IPU, 2024

When looking at concurrent forms of violence over the past year, the pattern holds. Most female respondents reported experiencing just one type of online violence, while most men reported facing three types concurrently. The same applies to offline violence – an expected outcome given that women report a much lower overall incidence.

Figure 26. Coexistence of different types of violence, by gender



Source: IPU, 2024

To explore potential associations between experiences of online and offline violence and sociodemographic aspects, Fisher's exact test was used. This non-parametric test was chosen due to its suitability for small sample sizes and for contingency tables with low expected frequencies – both of which apply to several subsets of the data. Unlike the chi-square test, Fisher's exact test provides accurate p-values regardless of distributional assumptions, allowing for a more robust assessment of statistical significance under these conditions. However, it is important to note that while Fisher's exact test is reliable for identifying statistically significant relationships, it does not provide a direct estimate of effect size or strength of association. For that reason, odds ratios were also calculated to complement the interpretation of the findings. Limitations include reduced statistical power in

small or imbalanced samples, which may obscure meaningful associations that do not reach significance thresholds.

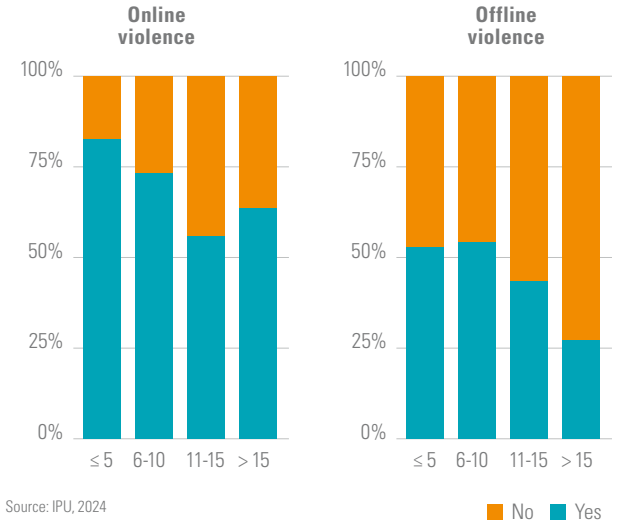
In the case of gender, the tests revealed no statistically significant associations with either online (p = 0.4861) or offline violence (p = 0.1019). However, the odds ratios point to different patterns in each case. For online violence, men were 1.71 times more likely than women to report incidents, while for offline violence, men reported experiences at a notably higher rate, with an odds ratio of 3.65. Although these findings do not reach conventional thresholds of statistical significance, they suggest potential gendered patterns in exposure to violence that warrant further exploration, particularly in relation to offline contexts.

- **Years in politics and age**

Among respondents, 35.1% have 5 years or less of political experience; 22.9% between 6 and 10 years; 17.3% between 11 and 15 years; and 18.7% more than 15 years.

As the graph illustrates, the impact of both online and offline violence is fairly consistent across these groups. For offline violence specifically, a slight decline is observed as political experience increases.

Figure 27. MPs experiencing violence, by their years in politics

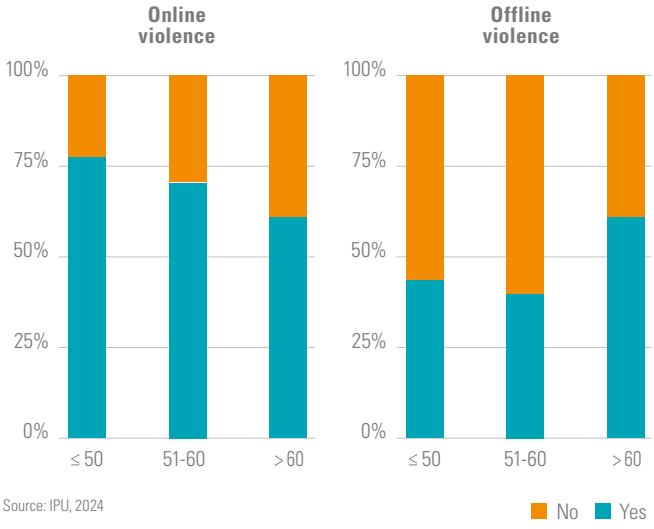


Source: IPU, 2024

Fisher's exact test revealed no statistically significant association between the number of years in politics and experiences of either online (p = 0.3211) or offline violence (p = 0.7583). These results suggest that, within this sample, time spent in politics does not appear to influence exposure to either form of violence. While more experienced politicians may develop strategies to mitigate risk or visibility, these findings do not indicate a consistent pattern related to political seniority.

As noted earlier, 95.8% of respondents were over 40 years old: 33.3% between ages 41 and 50, 41.6% between ages 51 and 60, and 20.8% over age 60. No direct proportional relationship between age and political experience emerges in this sample. Because only two respondents featured in the 31–40 age group and none in the 30-or-younger group, these were combined into a single category of "50 years old or younger" for the purposes of further analysis.

Figure 28. MPs experiencing violence, by age group



Source: IPU, 2024

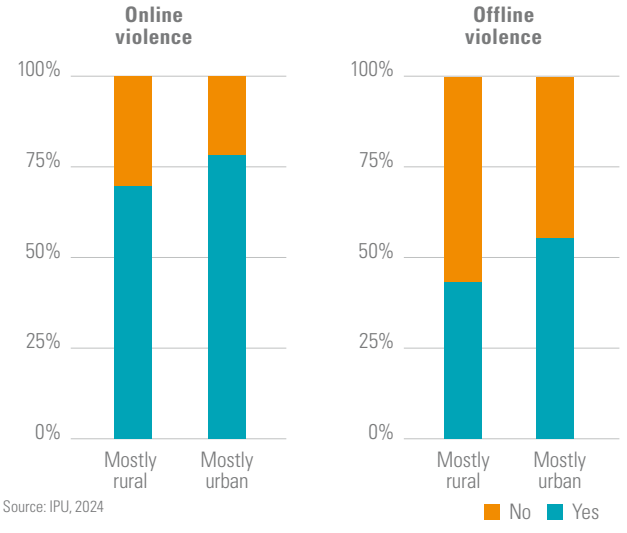
The graph indicates that the impact of online violence experiences a slight decrease as the age of the legislator increases, while the opposite occurs with offline violence.

Fisher's exact test found no statistically significant association between age and experiences of online (p = 0.5156) or offline violence (p = 1.0000). The distribution of responses was relatively balanced across age groups, with no particular category showing a clearly higher or lower exposure to violence. In the case of offline violence, the identical proportions of responses across groups may explain the p-value of 1.0000, which reflects the absence of detectable variation in this sample rather than evidence of an association.

- **Urban and rural districts**

Eighty-one per cent of MPs reported representing predominantly rural districts. Despite this imbalance in category sizes, the results indicate that offline violence has a greater impact in urban settings.

Figure 29. MPs experiencing violence, by type of district



Source: IPU, 2024

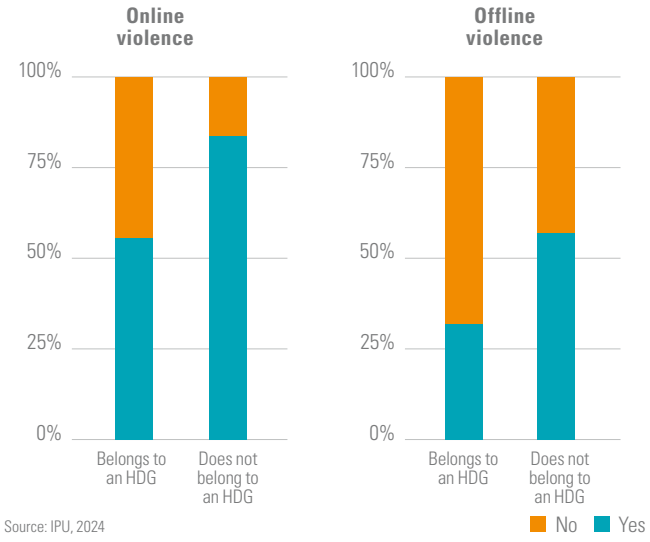
Fisher's exact test showed no statistically significant association between type of district (urban or rural) and experiences of either online (p = 0.7041) or offline violence (p = 0.4864). The findings point to an overall similarity in reported experiences of violence across geographic settings.

- **Belonging to HDGs**

A total of 45.8% of respondents identified as belonging to one or more HDGs, while 52% said they did not; the remainder did not respond.

The findings do not support the hypothesis that members of HDGs face higher levels of violence. Among those who answered "yes", 54% reported experiencing some form of online violence, compared with 84% among those outside minority groups. For offline violence, the figures were 31.8% and 56%, respectively.

Figure 30. Violence against MPs from historically disadvantaged groups



Source: IPU, 2024

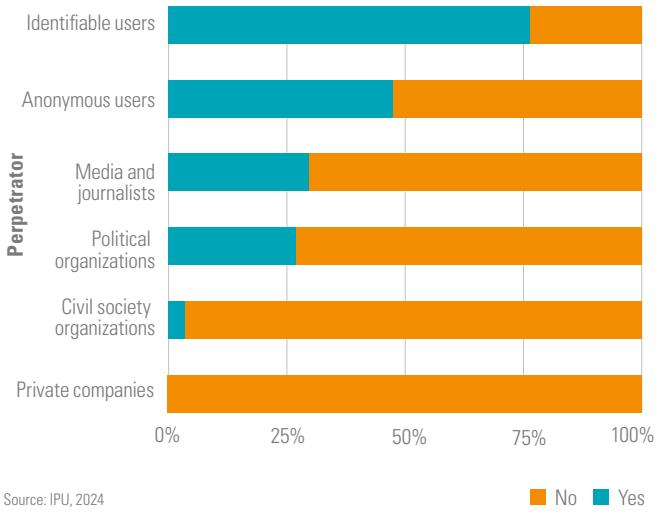
The relationship between belonging to an HDG and experiences of violence approached statistical significance in the case of online violence (p = 0.0533), with an odds ratio of 0.24. This suggests that individuals from these groups may be less likely to report online violence in this sample, although the result does not reach the conventional threshold for significance. For offline violence, no statistically significant association was found (p = 0.1428), with an odds ratio of 0.37, indicating a similar trend but with weaker evidence. These findings suggest a potential pattern that may warrant further investigation with larger samples.

a.2. Who is perpetrating the violence?

In the case of online violence, respondents indicated that acts of violence, which predominantly consisted of insults and threats, came primarily from identifiable users, unidentifiable users and the media.

"I was threatened with prison via WhatsApp by an individual I haven't yet been able to identify."

Figure 31. Perpetrators of online violence

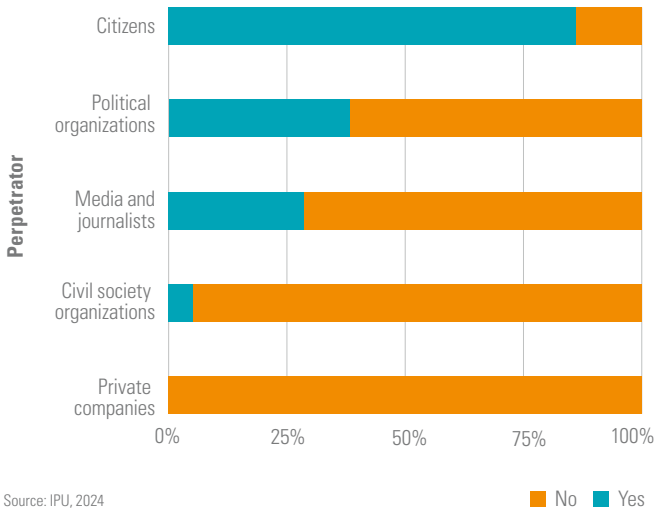


Source: IPU, 2024

"Following one of my speeches on the control of government action, which caused a real stir among the population, a citizen took my photo and mocked my clothing on all the forums in my electoral district, in order to tarnish my image."

In the case of offline violence, the acts of violence came primarily from citizens. In no case were private-sector companies or unions identified as promoters of violence.

Figure 32. Perpetrators of offline violence



Source: IPU, 2024

b. Perceptions about violence

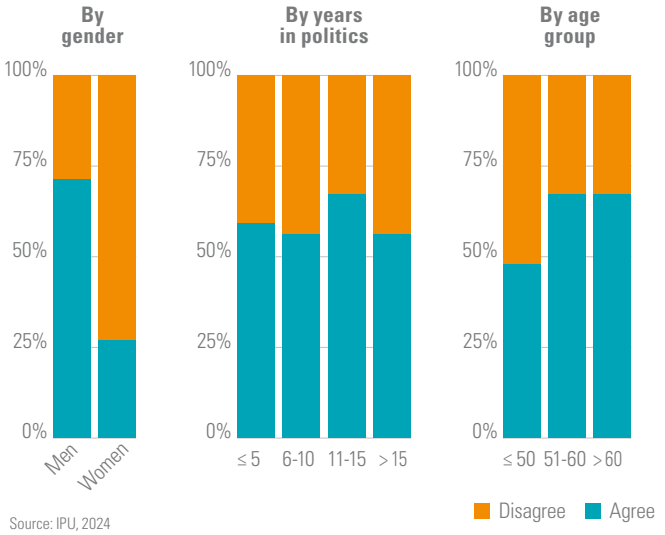
b.1. Normalization of violence

The results show that more respondents view violence as a cost of doing politics than do not: 52% agreed with the statement, 35% disagreed and the remainder did not answer.

"I take insults sportingly, having experienced the worst in social life before becoming a politician."

When the results are broken down by gender, political experience and age, notable patterns appear. Normalization is significantly higher among men than women, whose entry into politics is generally more recent. It is also somewhat lower among MPs aged 50 or younger than among their older peers.

Figure 33. Violence is a cost of doing politics



Source: IPU, 2024

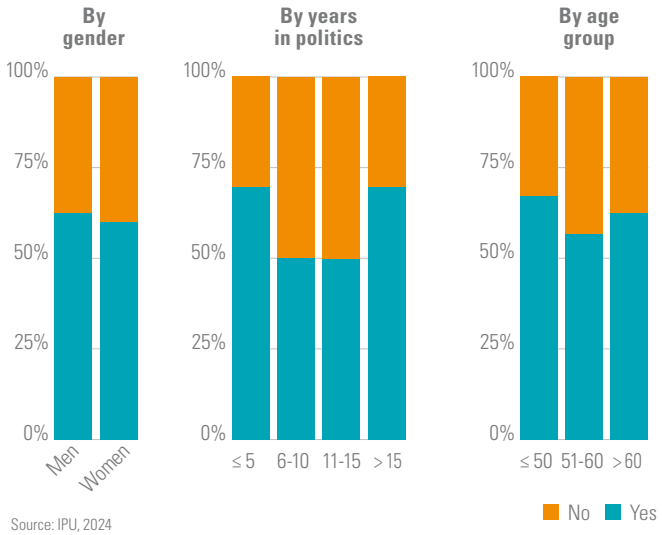
b.2. Increase in violence

Half of respondents said they believed violence had increased recently, while 31% disagreed and 8.8% were unsure. The rest did not answer.

"Violence erupted in the aftermath of the 2016 presidential elections."

The disaggregated analysis below is based on respondents who answered "yes" or "no", representing 80% of the sample. The graphs show a generally balanced perception of rising violence across gender and age groups. However, differences appear when years of experience and political trajectory are considered. MPs at both ends of the spectrum – those with 5 years of experience or less and those with more than 15 years – are more likely to believe violence has increased over the past five years.

Figure 34. Perception of a rise of violence in the last five years



Source: IPU, 2024

b.3. Contexts and topics that favour violence

Most respondents reported that violence tends to rise during debates on certain laws (75%) and in the lead-up to elections (73%). Additionally, 39% said it also increases when a corruption case becomes public.

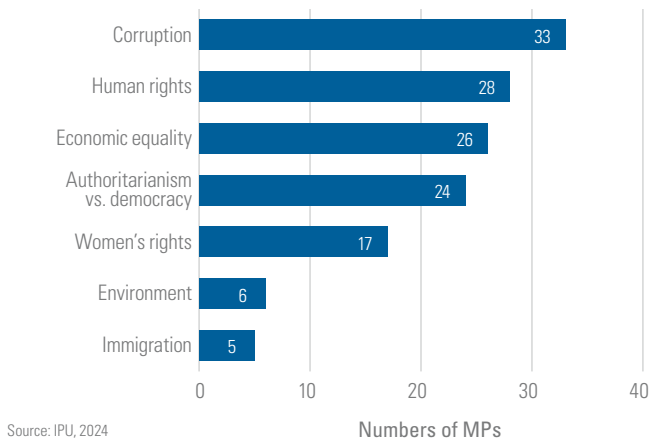
"There was violence during the vote on the law on the protection of women and girls and on the new electoral code."

For example, after the 2019 parliamentary elections in Benin, political violence rose sharply, with virtual attacks and smear campaigns targeting parliamentarians and other political figures. These ranged from online threats to the unauthorized release of personal information, significantly affecting political participation – particularly among women and younger politicians.

"During the vote on the law on reproductive health, all the MPs were insulted on social networks."

When asked whether certain topics might trigger violence, 52% responded "yes" and 25% "no", while the rest either did not know or chose not to answer. The most frequently cited issues were corruption, human rights, economic equality, and the tension between authoritarianism and democracy.

Figure 35. Perceptions of issues triggering violence



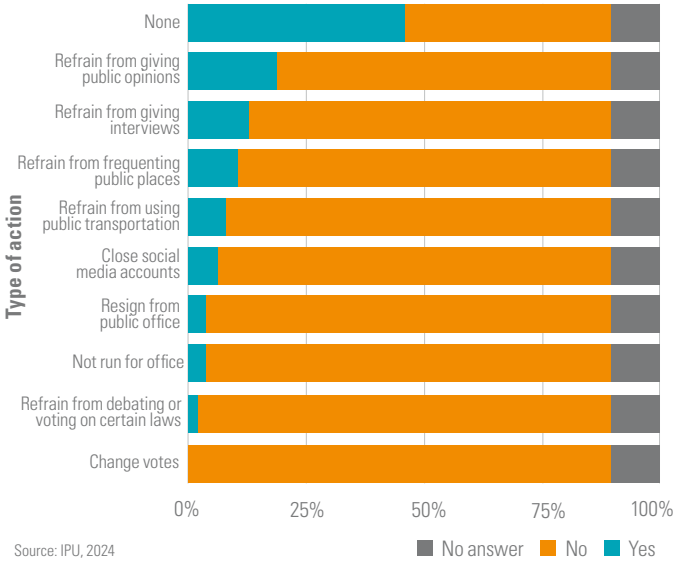
Source: IPU, 2024

c. Personal impacts of violence

c.1. Self-restrictions

When asked whether violence had led them to consider self-restrictive measures – such as avoiding public statements or interviews, abstaining from debates or votes on certain laws, limiting their presence in public spaces or on public transport, closing social media accounts, changing their vote, or even resigning – 45.8% of MPs said they had not considered any of these options.

Figure 36. Have you considered these actions?



Source: IPU, 2024

c.2. Violence against family members and friends

Among respondents, 31.2% reported that their family or friends had been subjected to violence, while 58.3% said they had not experienced such attacks. The rest did not answer.

d. Mental health

The relatively small number of Beninese MPs who answered the mental health and well-being questions (36 out of 48) limits the ability to interpret the prevalence of symptoms across the National Assembly. Within this group, 9 MPs (25%) reported that violence had negatively affected their mental well-being, while 27 (75%) said it had not. Thirteen MPs did not answer, suggesting the questions were either not relevant to them or that they preferred not to respond.

Among the nine MPs who reported a negative impact of violence – whether online or offline – on their mental health and overall well-being, seven cited experiences of stress and three mentioned anxiety. All seven MPs who reported stress also suffered insomnia. One MP additionally reported hypertension (high blood pressure).

None of the nine MPs who reported negative effects on their mental health met the diagnostic criteria for depression. Two had sought professional help. The small number of cases reporting poor well-being meant that inferential statistical analysis was not practicable.

Personal and family impact of violence

All of those MPs reporting a negative impact of violence on their mental well-being reported experiences of online violence in the previous year, compared with 17 out of 27 (63%) of those in good psychological health. Four out of nine MPs (who reported poor mental health) declared they were victims of offline violence, or threats of such violence – comparable to the proportion who did not report psychological distress (12 out of 27; 44.4%).

Among MPs who reported violence towards their families/friends, there was a higher rate of reporting negative effects on well-being (66%, i.e. 6 out of 9 MPs) than among MPs whose families/friends had not been targeted (26%, i.e. 7 out of 27 MPs), although this was not a statistically significant effect. It is noteworthy that almost half of those taking part in this survey – 16 out of 36 MPs, or 44.4% – reported violence towards their families/friends.

Links between mental health impacts, political behaviour and daily routine

Among MPs who reported a negative impact on their well-being, 1 of the 9 had considered resigning, compared with 1 of the 27 MPs who did not. One MP in this group also considered refraining from debates or voting, compared with none among those without reported effects on well-being.

Additional changes included self-censorship: one MP stopped expressing opinions in public, two avoided interviews with journalists, two avoided public places and one refrained from using public transport.

Interestingly, similar or even higher rates of self-restriction appeared among MPs who did not report a negative impact on their well-being. Nearly one third (8 of 27, 30%) refrained from expressing opinions in public, four (15%) avoided interviews, and three avoided public places or public transport. Closer examination suggests these behaviours may be linked to recent experiences of violence, even without reported psychological distress.

In conclusion, the relatively small number of MPs who answered questions on mental well-being limited the possibility of further statistical analysis. However, the findings suggest links between experiences of violence and negative psychological and behavioural consequences that warrant closer study. The concern extends beyond individual impacts to the notably high proportion of MPs reporting violence against their families and friends. In this sample, experiences of violence did not always correspond with poorer mental health, pointing instead to a broader negative impact on both MPs reporting distress and those in otherwise good psychological health. As noted elsewhere in this report, these results highlight complex relationships between violence and political performance – an area that has received limited attention in existing research.

e. Findings

The data analysis reveals no statistically significant correlation between parameters such as gender, age or years of political experience, and the probability of an MP experiencing violence. Consequently, according to the existing data, these elements do not function as reliable indicators of the occurrence of violence. It is important to acknowledge that, in certain contexts, such as the case of Benin, these factors may still have explanatory significance. This possible effect is likely associated with the distinctive qualities and particular dynamics of the population under investigation.

It is crucial to incorporate additional contextual elements, especially those that pertain to female MPs. Cultural norms and cultural expectations may cause women to underreport instances of abuse due to fears of social stigmatization, revenge or negative repercussions on their political careers. This reluctance to disclose could be exacerbated by the relatively recent emergence of women's involvement in politics in Benin. Due to shorter tenures in political positions, female parliamentarians may have had less opportunity to experience or report incidents of violence, thereby obscuring the actual magnitude of their experiences. These complexities highlight the necessity of employing more nuanced and thorough research methodologies that account for both the potential for underreporting and the changing position of women in Beninese politics.

Another key point is that the definition of violence used in this analysis is based on how legislators legally define and recognize it. This means that our findings reflect instances of violence that have been formally acknowledged, rather than isolated or anecdotal events. Consequently, the results may not comprehensively encompass all manifestations or instances of violence that occur in practice.

The relationship between individual characteristics and experiences of online and offline violence was assessed using Fisher's exact test, which was chosen due to the small sample size and the presence of low-frequency values in several categories. For online violence, none of the variables – gender, age, years in politics, type of district (urban or rural) and belonging to an HDG – reached the conventional threshold for statistical significance. However, the association with identification as part of an HDG came close ($p = 0.0533$). Notably, the odds ratios for gender in both online ($OR = 1.71$) and offline violence ($OR = 3.65$) indicated higher reported rates among men, though these differences were not statistically significant.

Fisher's exact test was selected because it does not rely on large-sample approximations and performs well with small or unevenly distributed samples. However, its statistical power is limited in such contexts, meaning it may not detect moderate or emerging patterns. Therefore, the absence of statistically significant results should not be interpreted as the absence of meaningful associations but rather as a signal that further research with larger samples is warranted. Also, local or subregional political dynamics and the readiness of individuals to disclose violent acts might influence the outcomes.

Notwithstanding these constraints, the data continue to offer valuable insights into the mechanisms of political violence in Benin. The discovered trends can have qualitative relevance and may indicate patterns and attain significance when paired with data from other countries or larger-scale investigations. Consequently, these data provide a significant basis for more research.

Palazzo Montecitorio, Italy's Parliament building and office of the Chamber of Deputies in Rome, Italy. © Andrea Ronchini/NurPhoto via AFP

Italy

1. Context

Italy is a parliamentary republic with a symmetrical bicameral system composed of the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate. Both chambers have equal legislative powers and jointly oversee the executive branch – a model often called "perfect bicameralism". A 2020 constitutional reform, approved by referendum, significantly reduced the number of legislators: the Chamber now has 400 members, and the Senate 200 elected senators plus a small number of life senators. While this change aimed to improve legislative efficiency, it also raised concerns about the system's representativeness.

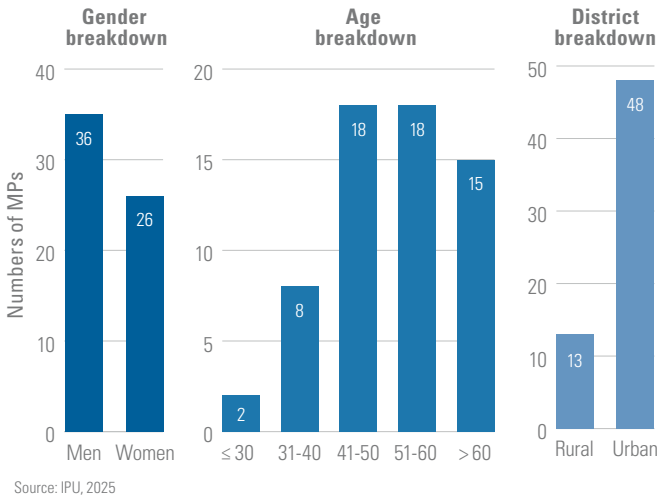
General elections take place every five years for both houses, unless parliament is dissolved early due to a political crisis. There is no staggered renewal: both chambers are fully re-elected each time. Since 2017, elections have followed a hybrid system combining first-past-the-post for about 37.5% of seats and proportional representation for the remaining 62.5%.

2. Survey results

The survey was conducted between March and July 2025 and sent to all members of the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate of the Parliament of Italy. The response rate was 10.17% (61 out of 600).

Among respondents, 26 were women (42.62%) and 35 were men (57.38%). More than half (54.1%) were over 40 years old, and 78.69% represented predominantly urban districts.

Figure 37. Italy - Sample breakdown

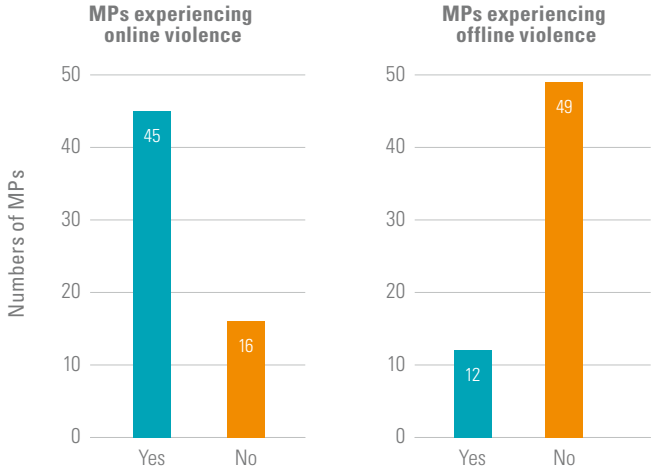


Source: IPU, 2025

Given the low response rate, these findings should be seen as exploratory rather than representative. While the data offer useful qualitative insights, methodological limitations are significant. Non-response bias, limited generalizability, and possible underreporting or social desirability bias – especially on sensitive issues such as online harassment or threats – cannot be ruled out. For this reason, statistical tests used in the other four country studies to assess correlations between demographics and experiences of violence were not applied here.

a. Incidence of violence in the last year

Figure 38. MPs experiencing violence in the last year



Source: IPU, 2025

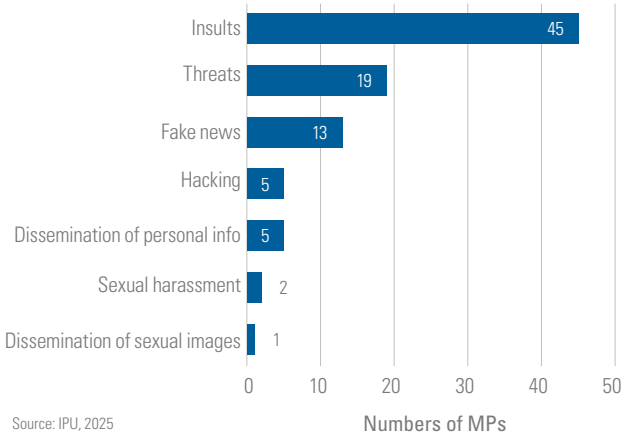
Even with a small sample, the results reveal a worrying trend consistent with other national case studies: digital violence is both widespread and persistent. Nearly 74% of respondents (45 out of 61) reported experiencing some form of online violence in the past year. Offline or physical violence was less frequent but still affected a significant share of MPs – about 20% (12 individuals).

"I was contacted anonymously by someone who warned me that all my personal details (telephone number, home address and personal information) were circulating on Telegram groups, identifying me as a target."

Insults and threats were the most common forms of online violence. Nearly three quarters of respondents reported being insulted, while about 31% said they had received threats. Other reported forms included fake news (21%), hacking and leaking of personal information (8% each), sexual harassment (3%) and the sharing of sexual images (1.6%). Twenty-eight out of 61 victims faced at least one incident per month, and 17 reported attacks on a weekly or even daily basis.

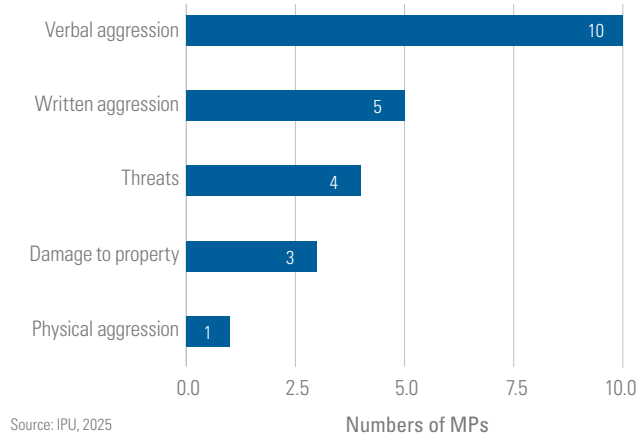
In the physical environment, verbal aggression was the most frequent form, reported by 43.48% of those who experienced physical violence. This was followed by written aggression (21.74%), threats (17.39%), property damage (13.04%) and physical assault (4.35%). As with online violence, 11 out of 61 victims said they faced incidents in most months.

Figure 39. Type of online violence experienced by MPs



Source: IPU, 2025

Figure 40. Type of offline violence experienced by MPs



Source: IPU, 2025

"The latest incident: a Kalashnikov bullet in my mailbox."

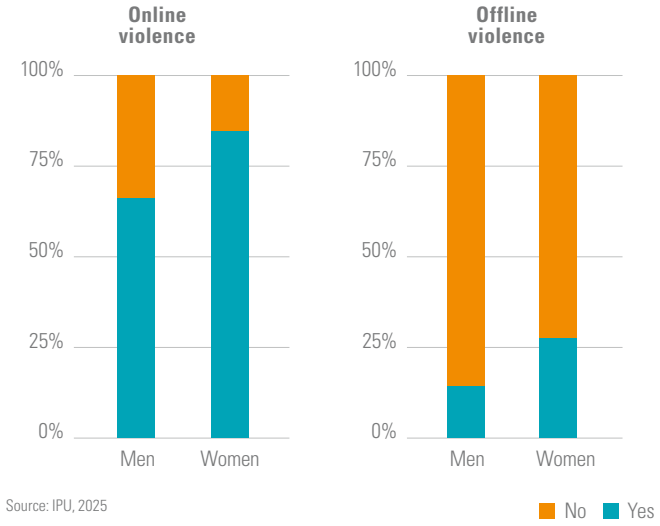
Many respondents experienced multiple forms of violence simultaneously. Among the 34 who reported online violence, 23 faced two or more types. More than half of those exposed to offline violence also encountered multiple forms over the year. In addition, 22 respondents said they had suffered both online and offline violence.

a.1. Disaggregated results

- **Gender**

Women in the sample reported higher levels of both online and offline violence than men. Among female respondents, 84.6% experienced some form of online violence, compared with 65.7% of men. The same pattern appeared offline: 27% of women reported physical violence, versus 14.3% of men.

Figure 41. MPs experiencing violence, by gender



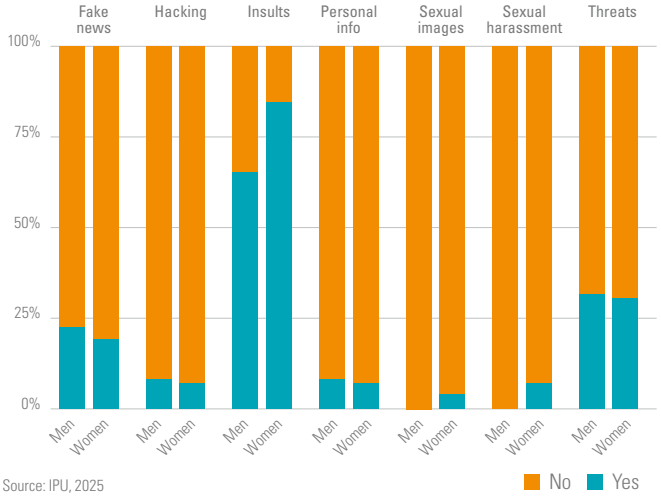
Source: IPU, 2025

"Comments on social media often use derogatory statements about being a woman, such as 'go back to the kitchen' or 'go back to stirring the sauce'."

Across both spheres, the most common forms of violence were insults, verbal aggression and threats. Yet when examining how these overlap, more nuanced patterns appear. In cases of online violence, most respondents – regardless of gender – reported experiencing a single type in the past year. However, women more often described multiple forms: one reported six different types of online violence, while some men reported up to four. This suggests that although single-type exposure is most common, women are more likely to face layered forms of online abuse.

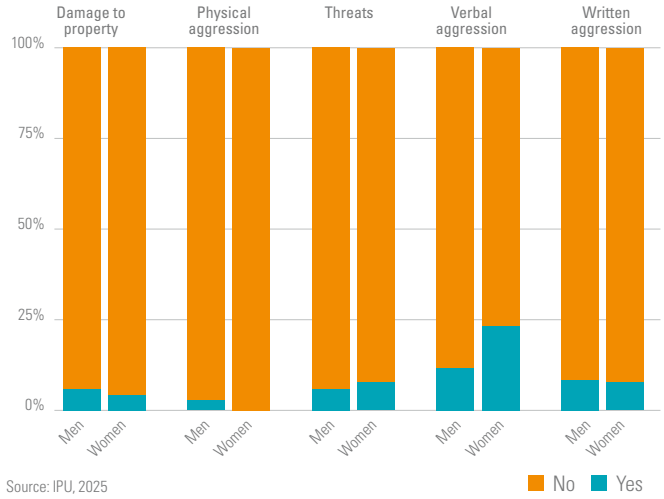
"I have been the target of image manipulation and offensive, sexist comments by anti-vaxxers."

Figure 42. Types of online violence, by gender of the MP



Source: IPU, 2025

Figure 43. Types of offline violence, by gender of the MP



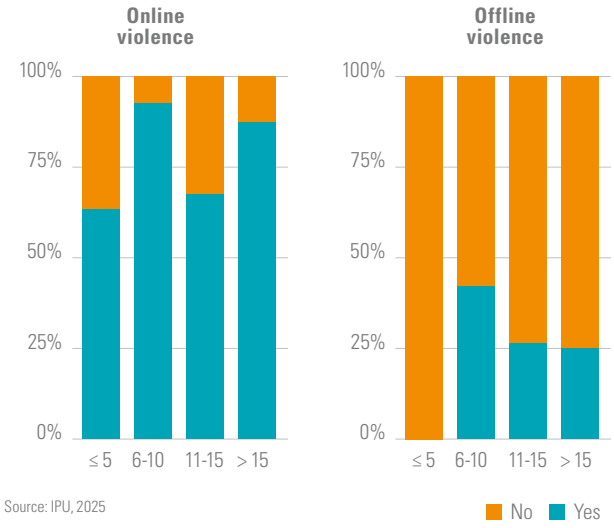
Source: IPU, 2025

A similar dynamic emerged offline, though with a different twist. Most respondents again reported experiencing only one type of violence. Among women, a few faced up to three types simultaneously, while some men reported as many as five. This may suggest a broader but less intense exposure among men, and a more concentrated, possibly more targeted, pattern among women.

- **Years in politics and age**

Among respondents, 39.3% reported having 5 years or less of political experience; 23% had between 6 and 10 years; 24.5% between 11 and 15 years; and 13.1% had more than 15 years.

Figure 44. MPs experiencing violence, by their years in politics



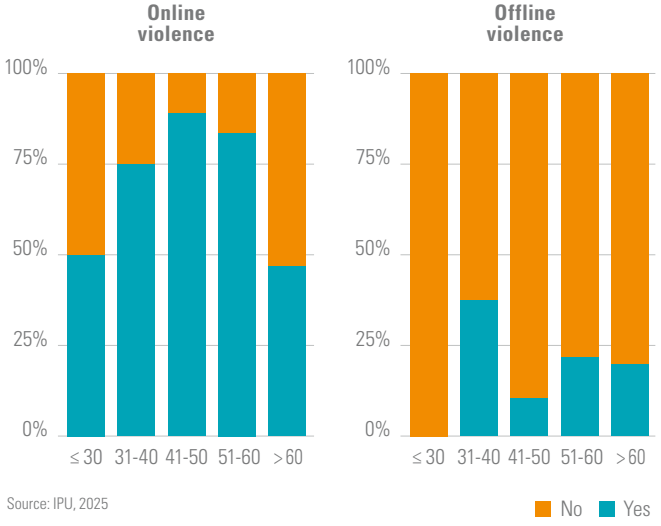
Source: IPU, 2025

The impact of violence is uneven across groups, especially in the case of online aggression. For physical violence, a downward trend appears as years in politics increase. Respondents with 5 years or less of experience reported no offline violence, while those with between 6 and 15 years showed higher incidence (six and four cases, respectively). The share drops again among those with more than 15 years of experience. This points to a non-linear relationship and raises questions about the role of exposure, seniority and political visibility in shaping experiences of physical intimidation.

Respondents with five years or less of political experience constitute the largest group in the sample (39.3%) and report the lowest levels of offline violence. In terms of online violence, while a majority (15 out of 24) did report some form of aggression, the proportion is lower than in other groups – particularly compared to those with between 6 and 10 years of experience (13 out of 14). This may reflect differences in visibility, public exposure or political roles. The comparatively lower levels among newer MPs could suggest that early-career members are less exposed to hostility, or that their experiences are less often recognized or reported as violence.

By contrast, online violence does not show a clear link with political experience. Respondents with between 6 and 10 years and more than 15 years of experience reported the highest levels (13 out of 14, and 7 out of 8, respectively), while those with between 11 and 15 years reported slightly lower levels (10 out of 15). This suggests that online aggression cuts across seniority, with no consistent relationship between political tenure and exposure.[5]

Figure 45. MPs experiencing violence, by age group



Source: IPU, 2025

Age shows a clearer pattern in relation to online violence. Reports increase steadily from the youngest group to those aged 51–60 years, with more than 80% of respondents in the 41–50 and 51–60 age groups reporting online abuse. The trend then reverses among the oldest MPs (>60), where fewer than half (7 out of 15) reported such experiences. This may reflect generational differences in digital use, online visibility or patterns of public engagement.

Offline violence, by contrast, does not follow a linear age pattern. Respondents aged 31–40 years, 51–60 years and over 60 years report similar levels of incidents, while the 41–50 age group – despite facing the highest rates of online violence – shows one of the lowest rates of offline aggression. These findings suggest that age cohorts experience and perceive political violence differently depending on the sphere (digital versus physical).

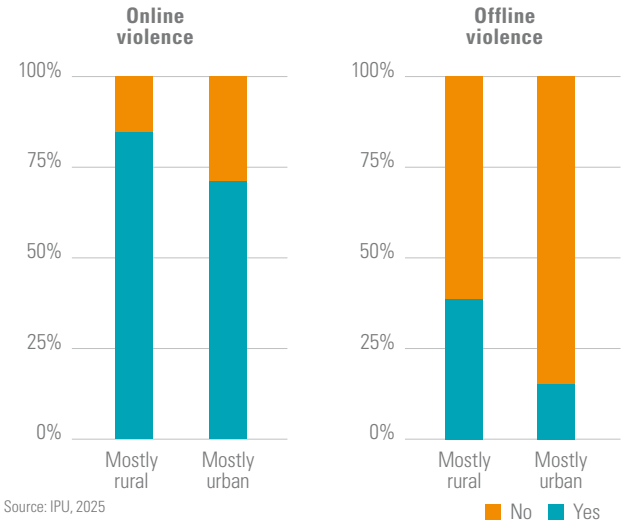
- **Urban and rural districts**

Seventy-eight per cent of respondents characterize their districts as mainly urban. The data reveal a higher proportion of offline violence among MPs representing rural constituencies (38.5%) compared to those from urban areas (14.6%), despite the smaller rural sample. This suggests that physical aggression may be more pronounced in rural settings. Conversely, online violence affects MPs across both urban and rural districts at similarly high rates, with slightly more respondents from rural areas (84.6%) than urban areas (70.8%) reporting incidents. These patterns indicate that while geographical context may shape exposure to offline violence, online abuse appears to transcend territorial boundaries, impacting legislators regardless of constituency type.[6]

5 The relatively small size of each subgroup advises caution in drawing definitive conclusions.

6 The relatively small size of each subgroup advises caution in drawing definitive conclusions.

Figure 46. MPs experiencing violence, by type of district



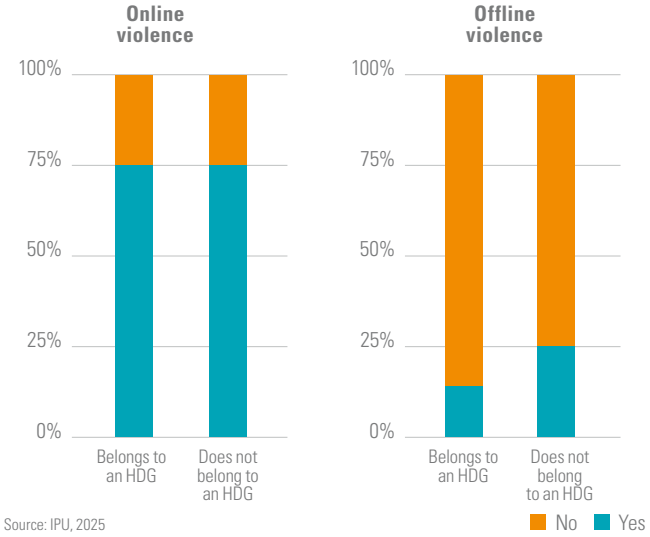
Source: IPU, 2025

- **Belonging to HDGs**

This section examines whether MPs who identify as part of HDGs are more likely to be targeted by violence on that basis. The data do not reveal a clear pattern. Among those identifying as minority group members, 75% reported experiencing some form of online violence – almost identical to the 74.19% of those who do not identify as such. For offline violence, the results are even more counterintuitive: 14.29% among minority respondents versus 25.81% among others.

Notably, nearly all women surveyed – 23 out of 26 – identified gender as a key factor in their marginalization. One respondent also highlighted her youth as an additional source of exclusion. These insights underscore the importance of adopting an intersectional lens when analysing political violence and marginalization.

Figure 47. Violence against MPs from historically disadvantaged groups

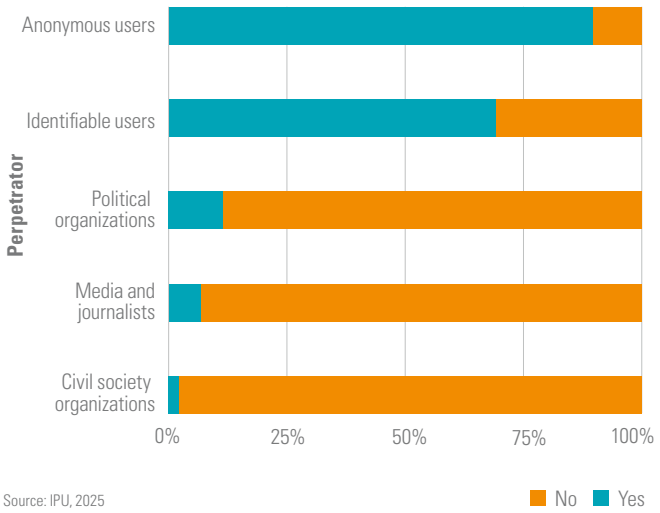


Source: IPU, 2025

a.2. Who is perpetrating the violence?

The data on perpetrators of violence against MPs reveal sharp contrasts between online and offline contexts. For online violence, anonymous and identifiable users stand out as the main perpetrators: nearly 90% of respondents attributed abuse to anonymous accounts, and almost 70% to identifiable individuals. Institutional or organized actors – such as political organizations and media or journalists – were mentioned less frequently, while civil society organizations and private companies were rarely identified as responsible.

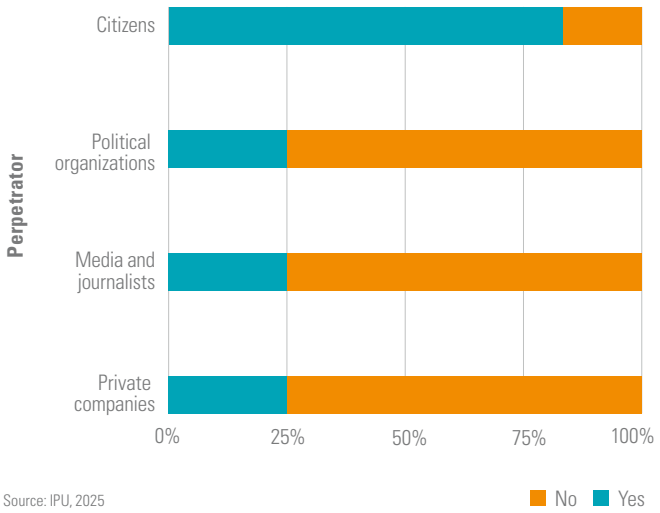
Figure 48. Perpetrators of online violence



Source: IPU, 2025

In contrast, offline violence is most often attributed to citizens, with smaller shares pointing to political organizations, media and journalists, and, to a lesser extent, private companies. As with online violence, civil society organizations were rarely identified as perpetrators.

Figure 49. Perpetrators of offline violence



Source: IPU, 2025

b. Perceptions about violence

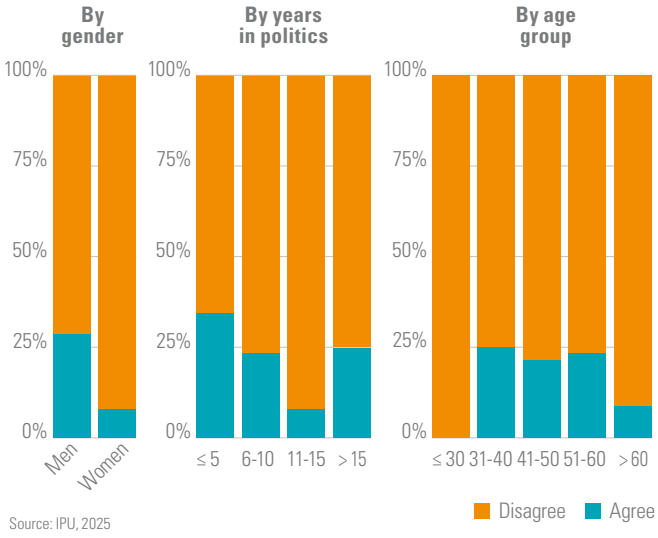
b.1. Normalization of violence

Men are significantly more likely than women to endorse the normalization of violence in political life. About 23% of male respondents agreed with the statement "violence is the cost of doing politics," 51% disagreed, and the rest either did not know or did not answer. By contrast, fewer than 10% of female respondents agreed, suggesting that women are more inclined to reject the notion that violence is an unavoidable aspect of their work.

Agreement by years in politics is relatively uniform across most experience levels, with around one quarter concurring with the statement – except in the 11–15 years cohort, where agreement drops sharply. Notably, this same group also reports lower levels of both online and offline violence compared to those with between 6 and 10 years or more than 15 years of experience. This disparity raises questions about whether mid-career legislators develop more effective coping mechanisms, receive stronger institutional support, or simply become less visible or contentious at that stage.

In terms of age, the tendency to accept violence as inherent to the profession is fairly consistent among younger and mid-career MPs. The oldest group, those over age 60, shows the lowest level of agreement, which may reflect generational differences in tolerance, or limited exposure to contemporary forms of violence, particularly online abuse.

Figure 50. Violence is a cost of doing politics



Source: IPU, 2025

The findings suggest that the normalization of political violence is far from universal, with perceptions shaped by gender, experience and age. Challenging this belief may be essential to preventing the further entrenchment of violence in political life.

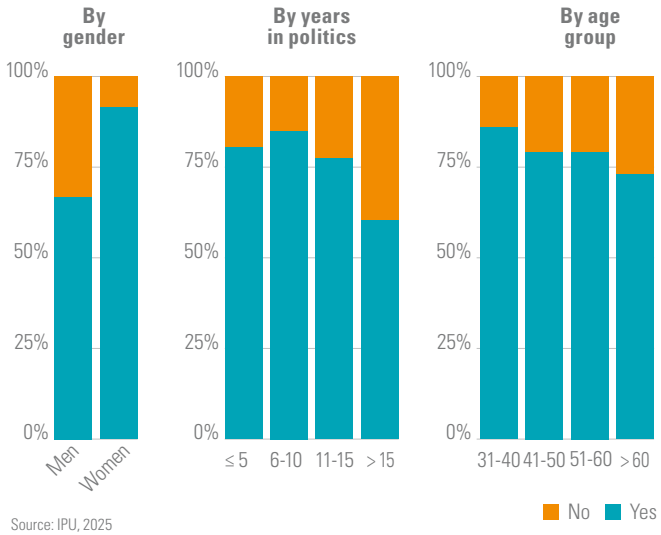
b.2. Increase in violence

Political violence is widely perceived to be on the rise – especially among women, younger MPs and those newer to politics. While fewer than half of male MPs (46%) recognize this increase, more than three quarters of female MPs (77%) say political violence has escalated in the past five years. This stark gender gap suggests women may be more directly exposed to, or attuned to, political aggression.

Newer politicians, with five years or less in office, also feel the pressure more acutely: half see a rise in violence and nearly a third remain unsure. By contrast, more experienced MPs tend to downplay these shifts, perhaps due to habituation or the perspective gained from a longer history of political turbulence.

"An influencer attacked me violently and incited her followers against me. No one from my party's leadership intervened to defend me."

Figure 51. Perception of a rise of violence in the last five years



Source: IPU, 2025

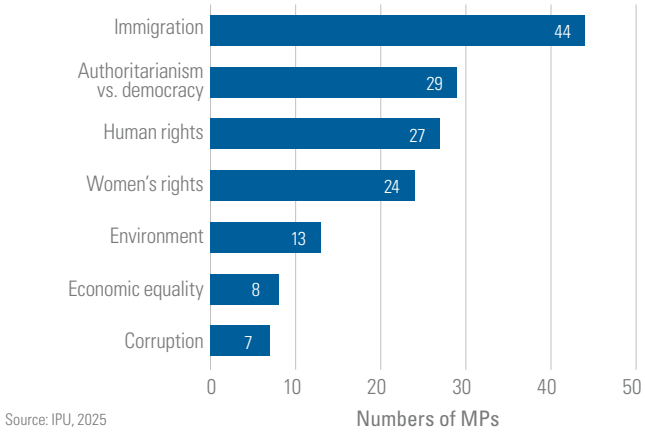
Age shows a similar pattern: the youngest MPs – especially those aged 31 to 40 years – are the most likely to perceive an uptick in violence, but recognition remains high even among senior MPs over age 60. This broad acknowledgement across age groups underscores the fact that rising political violence is not confined to specific demographics but is felt across the political spectrum.

A key driver of this increase is likely the expansion of digital platforms, which have amplified the reach, speed and visibility of political aggression. Tackling political violence today therefore requires addressing not only individual acts but also the wider social and technological environments that enable and sustain it.

b.3. Contexts and topics that favour violence

In Italy, migration stands out as the most frequently cited trigger for political violence, with 44 MPs identifying it as a key source of backlash. This underscores its central role in current political debates, where it intersects with xenophobia, nationalism and securitization narratives. Over the past year, several laws and decrees have focused on irregular migration – tightening expulsions, creating selective legal pathways for migrant workers and externalizing migration management. Notable measures include the agreement to transfer irregular migrants to facilities in Albania, restrictions on sea rescue operations by non-governmental organizations, and increased visa quotas for non-European Union citizens.

Figure 52. Perceptions of issues triggering violence



Authoritarianism and democracy (29 mentions) and human rights (27 mentions) follow closely, showing how debates around institutional legitimacy and civil liberties remain deeply polarizing. The frequent reference to women's rights (24 responses) highlights the persistent resistance to gender equality in Italian political discourse. Other issues – such as environmental concerns (13), economic inequality (8) and corruption (7) – were mentioned less often, suggesting that, while relevant, they are currently less likely to trigger violent reactions in the Italian context.

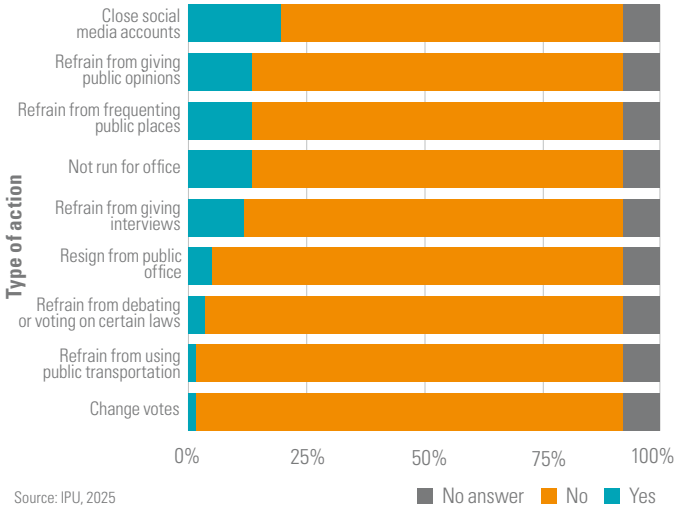
"During a commemoration in the square, I was interrupted several times by a screaming immigrant."

c. Personal impacts of violence

c.1. Self-restrictions

Political violence operates not only through direct harm but also by reshaping how parliamentarians approach their roles. The data reveal specific ways in which MPs adjust their behaviour in response to such threats. The graph illustrates how political violence influences decision-making and conduct in office, capturing both immediate and indirect changes in behaviour. Given the small number of cases in each category, the results are presented in aggregate form.

Figure 53. Have you considered these actions?



The most common response reported was the closure of social media accounts, cited by 12 respondents. This was followed by refraining from expressing opinions in public (8 MPs), avoiding public places (8) and deciding not to run for office (8). These patterns reflect a retreat from visibility – particularly in digital and physical spaces that are central to democratic representation.

Other notable reactions included avoiding interviews (7) and resigning from public office (3). Although less frequent, some MPs reported refraining from voting or debating on certain laws (2), avoiding public transport (1) or even changing a vote (1) – each showing how violence can, in isolated cases, directly undermine legislative autonomy.

These findings underscore the fact that the consequences of violence extend beyond physical and mental harm: they also shape political behaviour and representation. The evidence shows that political violence fosters self-censorship, withdrawal from public engagement, and, in some instances, disengagement from political life itself – affecting both men and women in parliament.

c.2. Violence against family members and friends

Among the MPs surveyed, 16 reported that their family members had been targeted with violence or threats. The responses reveal a clear pattern of behavioural adjustments aimed at reducing public exposure. Some MPs adopt multiple protective measures at once; for example, one respondent reported taking five different actions, including refraining from running for office again, resigning, avoiding interviews, and limiting their visibility in public spaces and on social media.

While these measures suggest a strategic retreat from certain political activities, not all MPs react in the same way. Some take only one precaution – most often reducing social media activity or deciding not to run again. This variation reflects differing perceptions of risk and access to coping strategies.

These findings highlight the fact that political violence affecting family members does not necessarily trigger a complete withdrawal from politics but rather encourages selective disengagement from specific public-facing activities.

d. Mental health

The proportion of Italian MPs responding to the mental health and well-being questions (61 out of 600) cautions against interpreting the prevalence of symptoms as representative of all. However, 20 of these 61 respondents (32.8%) reported that experiences of violence – whether online or offline – had negatively affected their mental health and quality of life (collectively referred to here as "well-being"). Of these, 20% (4 out of 20) met the Patient Health Questionnaire-2 (PHQ-2) threshold for possible depressive disorder, and 25% (5 out of 20) stated they had sought professional help.

Linked to their experiences of violence, 14 of the 20 MPs reported stress, 10 reported anxiety and 8 reported insomnia, while 2 recognized symptoms of depression. One MP reported their own substance abuse, possibly connected to a recent experience of violence.

Personal and family impact of violence

Among the 45 MPs who experienced online violence, 16 (35.6%) reported a negative impact on their well-being. Similarly, of the 12 MPs who had experienced offline violence, 5 (42%) said it had harmed their psychological well-being. Notably, among the 16 MPs who reported offline violence targeting their families or friends (26.2% of the sample), 62.5% (10 out of 16) reported negative effects on well-being – compared with 22% (10 out of 45) among those whose families or friends had not been targeted.

Links between mental health impacts, political behaviour and daily routine

Although relatively few MPs reported a negative impact on both their political behaviour and their well-being, the overlap is telling: between one quarter and half of those who restricted their political behaviour also reported harm to their well-being. For instance, 5 out of 20 MPs who reported negative effects on well-being said they had considered not running for office, compared with only 3 out of 41 who had not reported such an impact. As a result of violence, eight MPs or fewer considered avoiding giving their opinions in public or giving interviews to journalists – and at least half of these also reported negative impacts of violence on their well-being.

Fewer than three MPs had considered resigning, refraining from debating or voting on certain laws, or changing their voting intentions – and in all but one case, these MPs also reported negative effects of violence on their mental well-being.

Among those MPs who also reported a negative impact of violence on their well-being, 30% (6 out of 20) said they had refrained from frequenting public places. By comparison, less than 5% (2 out of 41) of MPs who had not reported a negative impact on their well-being said they had taken this measure. Only one MP had decided to refrain from using public transport, and 12 MPs took the step of closing their personal social media accounts, including 6 out of the 20 MPs (30%) who had also reported a negative impact on their mental well-being. By comparison, 6 out of 41 MPs (14.6%) reporting that their well-being had not been affected said they had closed their accounts.

e. Findings

Although the Parliament of Italy operates within a robust institutional framework, it faces contemporary challenges that are increasingly common across democratic systems. Among these are the rise of online hate speech, the spread of disinformation, and the targeting of public figures based on gender, sexual orientation or political ideology. These dynamics have had concrete repercussions on parliamentary work and the safety of elected officials, particularly in a context of growing political polarization.

Despite the limitations of a small sample, several clear trends emerge, highlighting the pervasive – and often gendered – nature of political violence by the public.

Online violence is widespread and recurrent, affecting nearly three quarters of respondents. The most common forms include insults, threats and the spread of disinformation, with many reporting weekly or even daily occurrences. These attacks are often amplified on social media and other digital platforms.

Gender plays an important role in vulnerability to political violence among women parliamentarians. Among the 26 female respondents, 23 explicitly identified their gender as the main factor making them targets. Women reported higher levels of both online and offline violence than men, with 84.6% experiencing online abuse versus 65.7% of men, and 27% suffering offline violence compared to 14.3% of men. Furthermore, women are more likely to face multiple, overlapping forms of abuse – indicating a more layered and targeted pattern – while men tend to report broader but less concentrated experiences. Although intersectional factors like race or migration background were less frequently mentioned within the sample, recognizing these overlapping identities remains important to fully understand the complexity of political violence, as illustrated by the public case of Ms. Cécile Kashetu Kyenge, the first Black Cabinet minister in Italy, and the country's former minister for integration, who faced sustained harassment owing to the intersection of her gender, race and migrant background.

Immigration is the issue most frequently cited as a trigger of political violence, mentioned by 44 MPs. This underscores the issue's centrality in contemporary political debates. Recent legislative efforts have included measures to tighten deportations, to facilitate entry for select migrant workers and to externalize migration control – all of which have sparked intense public and political reactions. Other polarizing topics – such as democracy, rights and public security – also act as triggers for political violence. Recent debates around issues like the 2025 Security Bill provide important context for understanding the broader environment in which political violence occurs. This legislation has sparked significant controversy and public concern over potential impacts on civil liberties and protest rights.

Political violence carries tangible consequences, influencing both behaviour and career choices. Several MPs reported self-censoring, limiting their public presence or opting out of future elections. These effects were especially pronounced when violence extended to family members. In such cases, respondents described adopting multiple self-protective strategies – such as avoiding media appearances, closing social media accounts or even resigning from office. Mental health impacts like stress, anxiety and insomnia were also commonly reported.

House of Representatives in Kuala Lumpur. © Hasnoor Hussain/POOL/AFP

Malaysia

1. Context

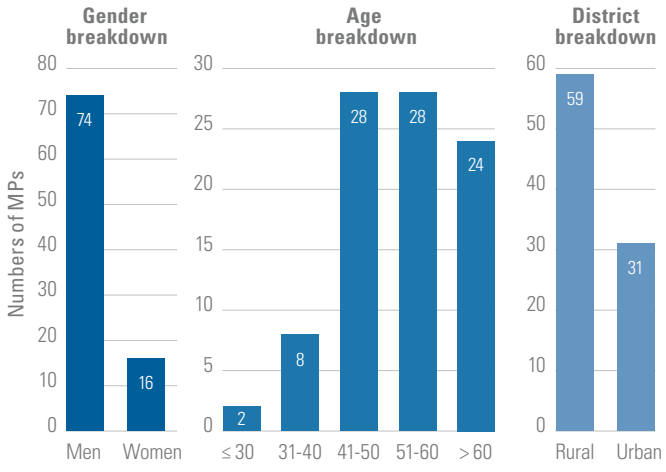
Malaysia, a federal constitutional monarchy, has a bicameral Parliament consisting of the House of Representatives and the Senate. The House of Representatives comprises 222 members chosen directly by the people using a first-past-the-post electoral system. The Senate comprises 70 senators, with 26 elected by state legislative assemblies and 44 chosen by the king at the prime minister's recommendation. The Senate possesses more restricted powers than the lower house and is unable to initiate financial legislation, resulting in an asymmetric bicameralism in Malaysia.

In Malaysia, a multi-ethnic population and a complex history of coalition governments, party disintegration and fluctuating alliances shape the country's political landscape. It has always employed electoral boundaries and affirmative actions to secure Malay political supremacy, frequently sidelining minority representation. Although general elections are competitive, the political landscape is restricted by legislation that limits civil liberties, such as the Sedition Act and the Communications and Multimedia Act, which may be employed to suppress dissent.

2. Survey results

Between August and September 2025, a survey was conducted among Malaysian MPs.[7] The response rate was 40.5% (90 out of 222 MPs). This information provides a solid basis for cross-sectional analysis. The sample reflected the general composition of the Parliament: 74 men (82.2%) and 16 women (17.8%), with the majority between 41 and 60 years of age. Rural constituencies were more heavily represented, accounting for 65.6% of respondents, compared with 34.4% from urban areas.

Figure 54. Malaysia - Sample breakdown



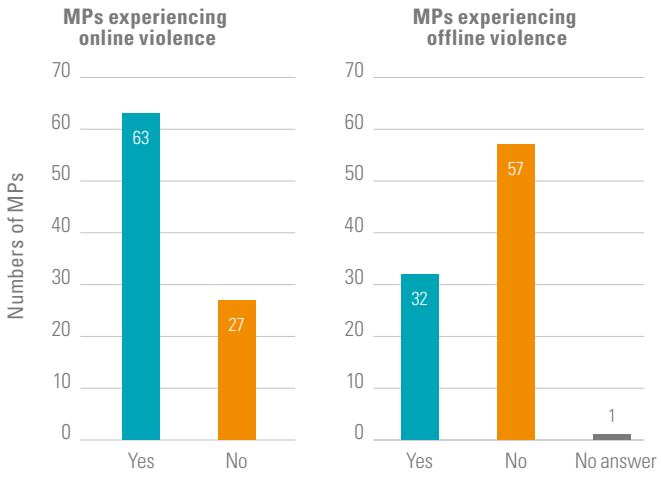
Source: IPU, 2025

7 The Senate of Malaysia was not taken into consideration in this study, primarily because its members are not directly elected by the people. As a result, senators generally have lower public visibility and are less exposed to the forms of political violence that tend to target elected representatives who maintain direct contact with constituencies. Including them would also have risked distorting the data by overrepresenting individuals whose roles and experiences are not comparable to those of parliamentarians elected through competitive processes. Moreover, the limited public recognition of senators further reduces the likelihood that they would face the same intensity or frequency of politically motivated attacks, reinforcing the decision to focus the analysis exclusively on members of the House of Representatives.

a. Incidence of violence in the last year

The incidence of political violence in Malaysia proved to be strikingly high. Seven out of 10 respondents (70%) reported having experienced online violence in the past year, while more than one third (35.6%) reported exposure to violence in offline settings. These figures reveal that the phenomenon is not marginal but rather systemic, cutting across party lines, territories and parliamentary seniority. Frequency data underscore the persistence of intimidation: among those who suffered online violence, nearly 70% faced it monthly, and more than one in five encountered it weekly. Offline violence was also recurrent, with over 70% of respondents describing monthly incidents and almost 10% reporting daily aggression.

Figure 55. MPs experiencing violence in the last year

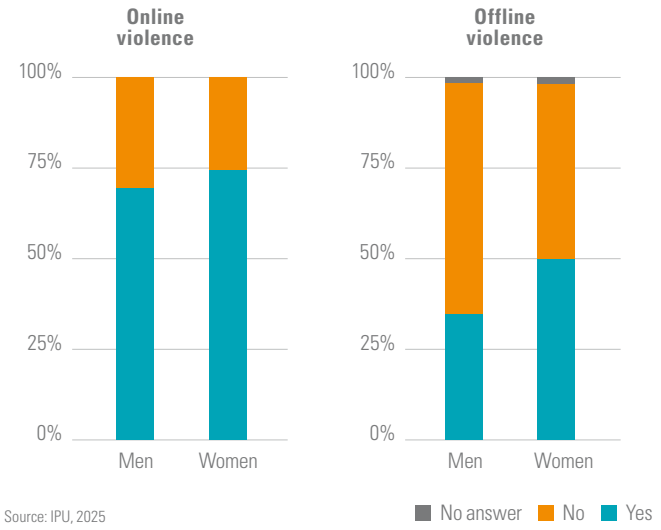


Source: IPU, 2025

a.1. Disaggregated results

- **Gender**

Figure 56. MPs experiencing violence, by gender



Source: IPU, 2025

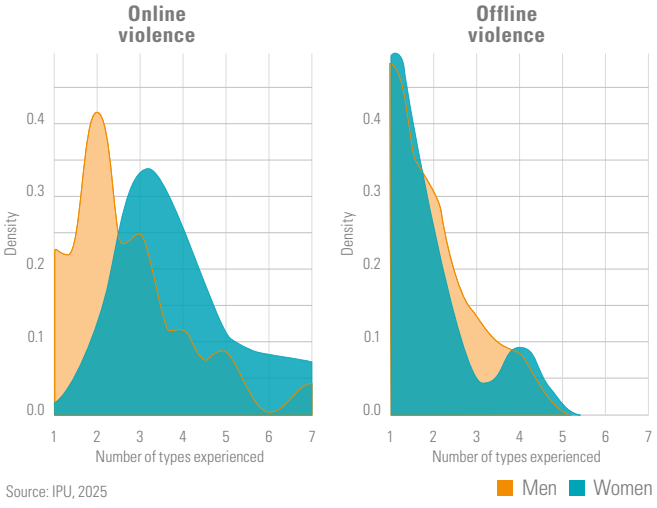
Women respondents reported higher exposure to both online and offline violence than their male colleagues. Descriptively, 75% of women acknowledged online aggression versus 68.9% of men, and half of all women MPs surveyed experienced offline violence, compared with 32.4% of men. Sexual harassment and the dissemination of sexualized images were reported more frequently by women, highlighting a dimension of political hostility that intersects directly with gender-based violence. These patterns reflect broader patriarchal dynamics in Malaysian political culture, where women often face barriers not only to entry but also to equal participation once in office, and echo global evidence showing that women politicians are disproportionately targeted with gender-specific forms of violence aimed at undermining their legitimacy or silencing them.

"After I recently gave birth, I was told to retire and become a housewife. Now my children's pictures were sent by email as a form of threat to me."

Statistical tests did not confirm a significant association between gender and online violence (Fisher's exact p = 0.537). For offline violence, differences also did not reach conventional thresholds. However, the relatively small number of women respondents (n = 16) and the unbalanced sample limit the power of these tests, meaning that lack of significance does not imply absence of a real effect.

Importantly, the higher prevalence of sexual harassment and sexualized imagery among women underscores the gendered nature of this violence, suggesting that even when broad statistical patterns are unclear, the qualitative burden for female MPs is substantial. These findings reinforce the need to interpret gendered dimensions of political violence with care, acknowledging both the descriptive trends and the limitations of inferential testing.

Figure 57. Coexistence of different types of violence, by gender

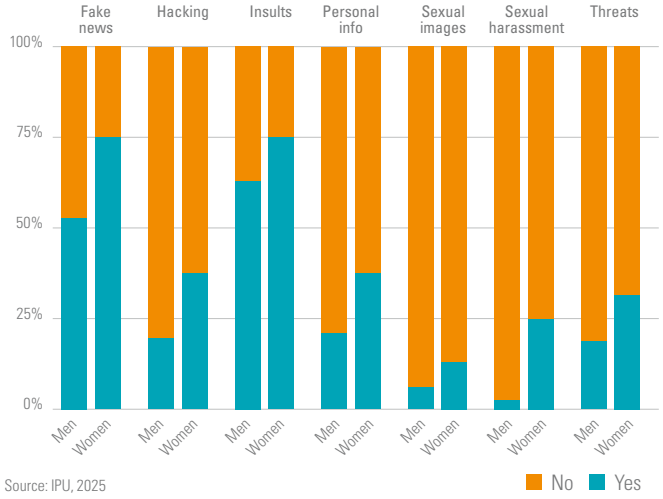


Source: IPU, 2025

The density plots illustrate the concurrence of multiple forms of violence, revealing a pronounced gender difference online. Men most frequently reported experiencing only one or two types of online violence, with the distribution concentrated at the lower end of modalities. By contrast, women showed a higher probability of facing three or more

types simultaneously, with the curve extending towards six or seven forms of abuse. This indicates that when women MPs are targeted online, the violence is more often cumulative, combining insults, threats, doxxing and sexualized harassment rather than occurring in isolation.

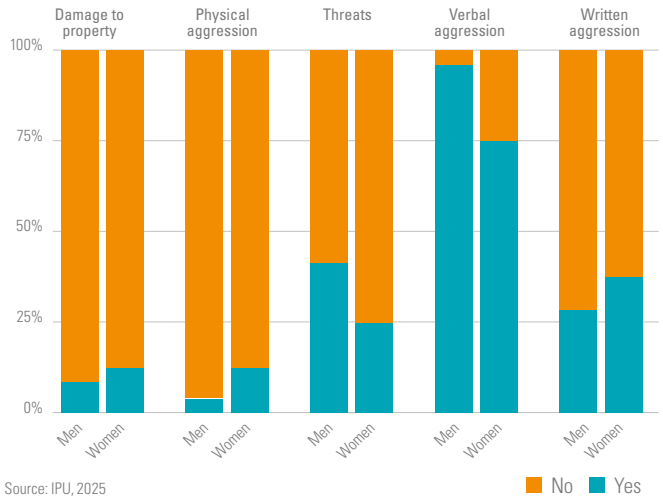
Figure 58. Types of online violence, by gender of the MP



Source: IPU, 2025

Offline, the patterns were more similar across genders, with both men and women largely reporting one or two types of aggression. Nevertheless, women still showed a slightly greater likelihood of suffering three or more concurrent forms. These findings underscore that political violence in Malaysia is not only prevalent but also layered, and that women MPs in particular are exposed to a broader concurrence of hostile practices, especially in the digital sphere.

Figure 59. Types of offline violence, by gender of the MP



Source: IPU, 2025

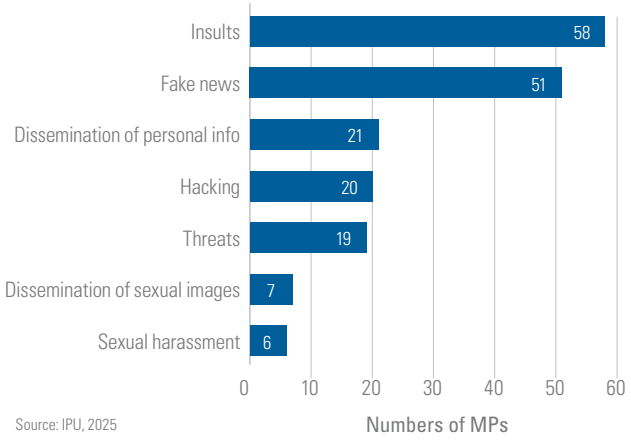
The cumulative effect of multiple concurrent forms of violence is significant. Research in other contexts shows that exposure to layered violence has exponential psychological and professional impacts compared to isolated incidents. For Malaysian women MPs, this suggests heightened risks of burnout, withdrawal from public debate or premature exit from political life, which weakens democratic representation.

- **Types of violence**

When the types of online violence are examined, insults emerge as the most common modality, affecting 64.4% of all MPs. The spread of false information, reported by 56.7%, reflects the centrality of disinformation campaigns in digital political conflict. Threats, doxxing and hacking, though less frequent, reveal more organized strategies of intimidation and invasion of privacy. Sexual harassment and sexualized images were less prevalent overall but disproportionately concentrated among women MPs. Offline violence was expressed primarily through verbal aggression, affecting nearly one third of respondents, followed by threats and written aggressions. While property damage and physical assaults were relatively rare, their existence within parliamentary experience is alarming, as they represent direct attempts to curtail political activity through intimidation.

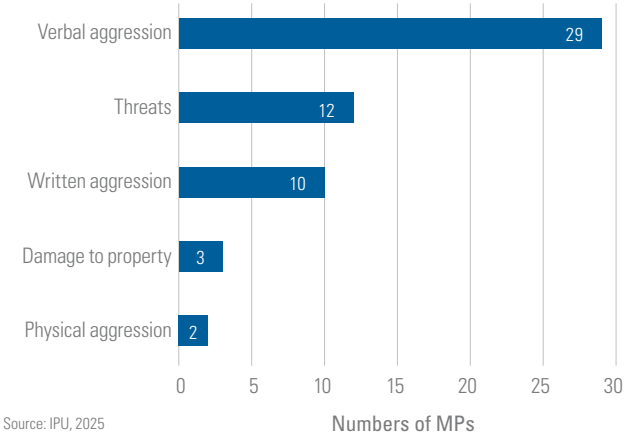
"I received a video of shootings with the message 'I know where you are'."

Figure 60. Type of online violence experienced by MPs



Source: IPU, 2025

Figure 61. Type of offline violence experienced by MPs



Source: IPU, 2025

"I received threats in the form of letters and had some private vehicles damaged."

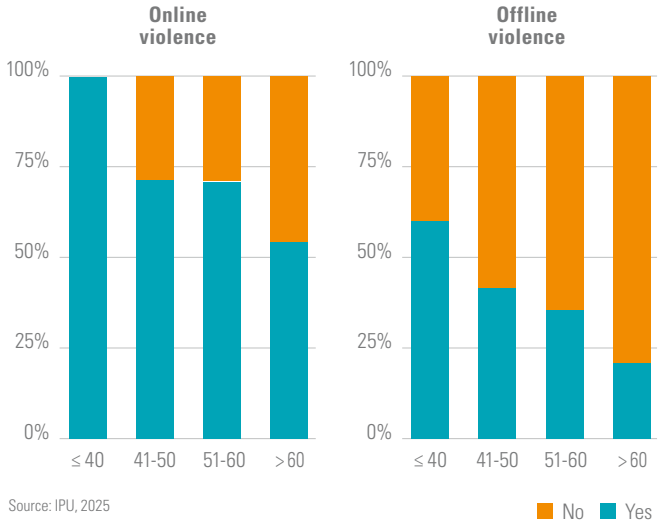
Based on the full sample (n = 90), the most frequent forms of online aggression were insults (64.4%) and false information (56.7%), followed by doxxing (23.3%) and hacking (22.2%). Sexual harassment (6.7%) and sexualized images (7.8%) were less common overall, though relatively more frequent among women than men. Offline, verbal aggression was the most frequent form (32.2%), followed by threats (13.3%) and written aggression (11.1%). Physical attacks (2.2%) and property damage (3.3%) were rare.

The higher prevalence of sexualized attacks among women highlights that these forms of violence should not be dismissed as marginal. In policy terms, this underscores the need for specific protective mechanisms for women MPs, such as dedicated reporting channels for sexual harassment and stricter regulations on digital platforms.

- **Years in politics and age**

Younger MPs tended to report higher exposure to online violence, with 100% of MPs aged 40 or under experiencing at least one form, followed by 71.4% of MPs aged between 41 and 50 years and between 51 and 60 years, and 54.2% of MPs over age 60. For offline violence, the highest relative frequency was also observed among the youngest MPs (≤40, 60%), with prevalence decreasing progressively in older age groups: 41–50 (40.7%), 51–60 (35.7%) and >60 (20.8%). These trends suggest that younger MPs may be more visible targets for both online and offline forms of political violence.

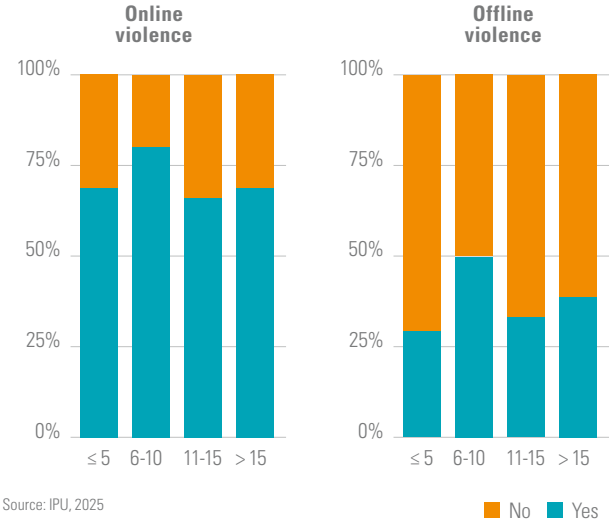
Figure 62. MPs experiencing violence, by age group



Source: IPU, 2025

Looking at years in politics, online violence was reported in absolute terms by many MPs at the extremes of tenure, with 22 MPs with 5 years of experience or less and 25 MPs with more than 15 years of experience reporting incidents of online aggression. Relative percentages were highest among MPs with between 6 and 10 years in politics (80%), although this group is small. Offline violence appeared across all career stages, with the highest relative frequencies among MPs with between 6 and 10 years (50%) and more than 15 years (38.9%) of political tenure, indicating no clear linear trend.

Figure 63. MPs experiencing violence, by their years in politics



Source: IPU, 2025

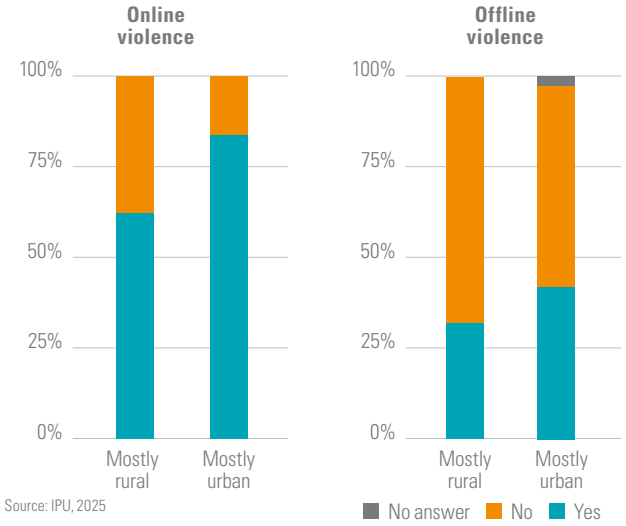
Statistical tests confirmed that most of these differences were not significant. Online violence showed no significant association with age (Fisher's exact p = 0.238) or years in politics (p = 1), while offline violence also did not vary significantly by age (p = 0.177) or years in politics (p = 0.656). These results suggest that while descriptive trends indicate certain patterns of exposure, there is no strong statistical evidence of systematic differences across age groups or parliamentary seniority.

These patterns highlight that exposure to political violence varies by age and years in politics, reflecting differences in visibility, political activity and use of digital platforms, rather than clear-cut risk categories. The descriptive trends provide a nuanced view of who is more likely to encounter different forms of violence, while the Fisher's exact tests contextualize the statistical reliability of these observations.

- **Urban and rural districts**

Unlike in the other case studies, territorial differences showed a marked pattern for online violence: MPs from urban constituencies reported higher exposure than their rural counterparts (urban: 84%; rural: 63%), and this difference was statistically significant (Fisher's exact p = 0.0255). Offline exposure, however, was more evenly distributed (urban: 42%; rural: 32%) and did not reach statistical significance (p = 0.240), underscoring that while geographic representation may influence digital exposure, offline violence appears to be a structural feature of parliamentary life affecting MPs across constituencies. These results highlight that digital visibility and constituency type may shape online risks, whereas offline threats are more uniformly experienced, independent of geography.

Figure 64. MPs experiencing violence, by type of district

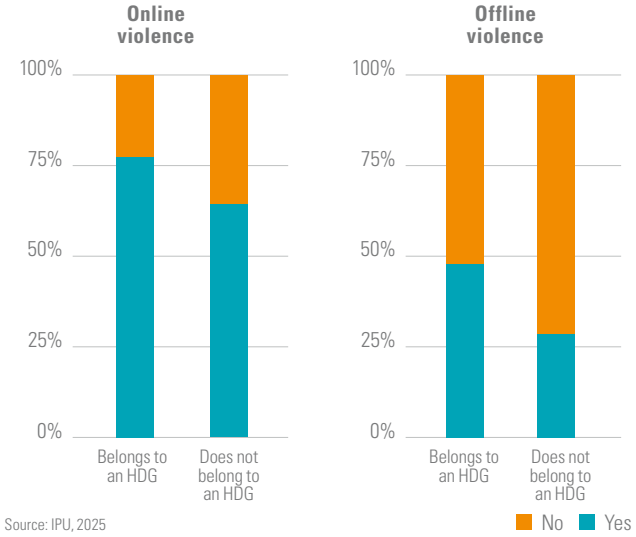


Source: IPU, 2025

- **Belonging to HDGs**

A notable disparity emerged among MPs identifying as members of HDGs, including ethnic or religious minorities, women who self-identified as belonging to groups historically disadvantaged due to gender, those born into low-income households, or those with disabilities. Approximately 41% of respondents described themselves as belonging to such groups. Among these MPs, 78% reported experiencing online violence, compared with 65% of their peers who do not belong to disadvantaged groups. This indicates an intersectional dynamic in which political violence compounds pre-existing social marginalizations, producing differentiated risks for those already facing structural exclusion.

Figure 65. Violence against MPs from historically disadvantaged groups



Source: IPU, 2025

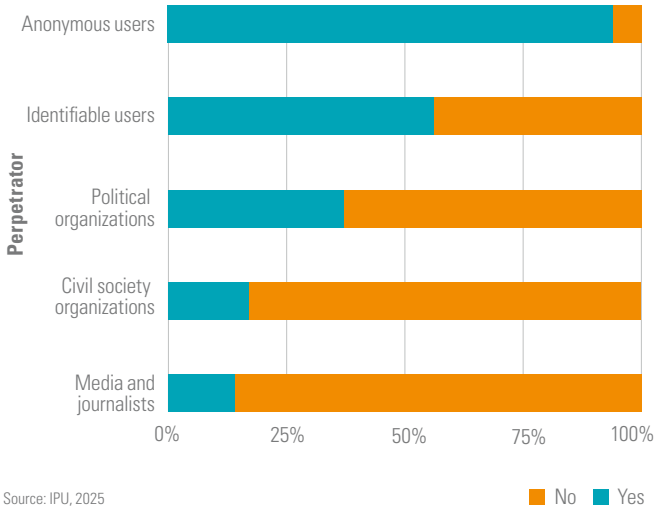
Statistical tests indicated that, although online violence was more common among MPs from disadvantaged groups, the difference did not reach statistical significance (Fisher's exact p = 0.238). Offline violence was also more prevalent in this group (47.2% versus 27.5%), but this difference only approached conventional thresholds of significance (Fisher's exact p = 0.0713). Despite the modest sample size and limited statistical significance, these findings underscore the intersectional nature of political violence in Malaysia, highlighting how structural inequalities are mapped onto differential experiences of risk for MPs.

a.2. Who is perpetrating the violence?

Respondents attributed online violence primarily to anonymous users on social media platforms, with many describing coordinated campaigns of harassment. Identifiable individuals and partisan digital accounts also featured among perpetrators, suggesting a blurring of lines between spontaneous hostility and orchestrated attacks. Offline aggressions were most commonly attributed to citizens and party activists, occasionally extending to civil society organizations mobilized in protest settings.

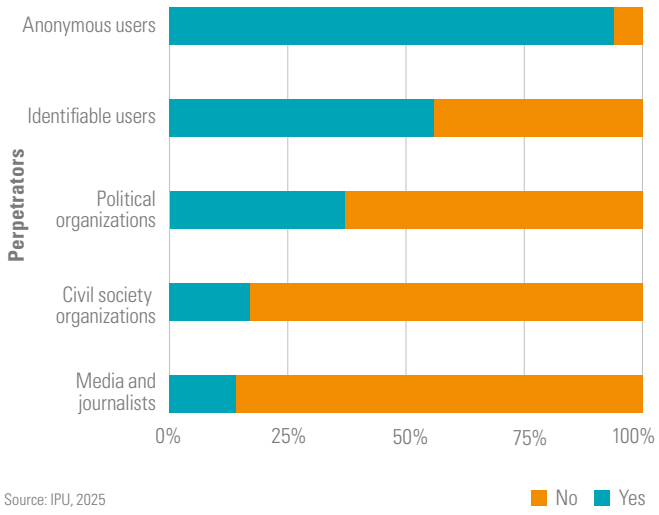
"I received a death threat from my state assemblyman; he said he would kill me if I supported another candidate against him."

Figure 66. Perpetrators of online violence



Source: IPU, 2025

Figure 67. Perpetrators of offline violence



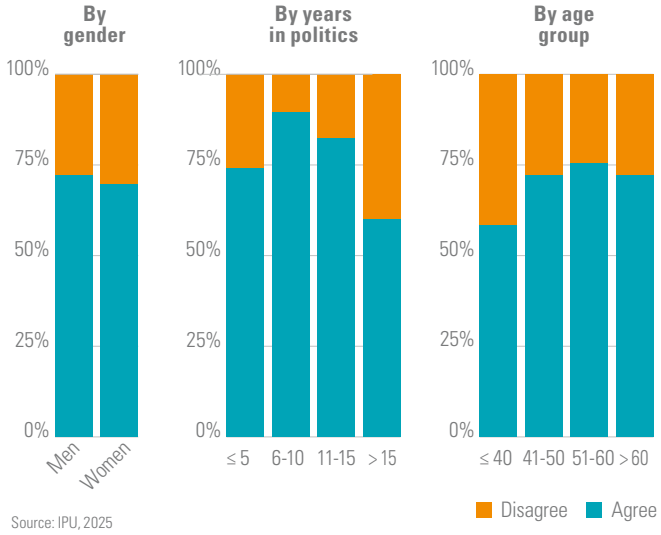
Source: IPU, 2025

b. Perceptions about violence

The perceptions of MPs about violence are as significant as the incidents themselves. A majority of 61.1% agreed with the statement that "violence is the cost of doing politics." Only 24.4% rejected this normalization. This reveals a troubling degree of resignation within parliament, where violence is accepted as a structural component of political life rather than an aberration to be challenged. Perceptions of trends are equally concerning: 64.4% of MPs stated that violence had increased over the past five years, with younger MPs especially likely to report an escalation.

"Before joining politics, I was asked: Are you willing to go to prison? If not, don't even bother. Of course it is a cost of being an MP."

Figure 68. Violence is a cost of doing politics



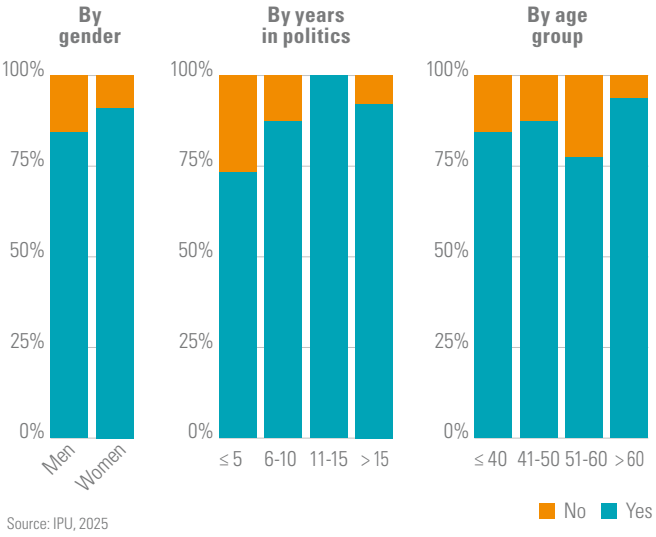
Source: IPU, 2025

The survey data show a near-consensus among Malaysian MPs that political violence has increased in the last five years, cutting across gender, age and political seniority. Women are slightly more likely than men to perceive escalation, which aligns with their heightened exposure to cumulative and sexualized forms of harassment, making them more sensitive to deteriorating conditions.

"When I change my political support, the public and politicians unleash their anger at me with insults and all kinds of abuse."

By contrast, differences by age and parliamentary experience reveal subtle nuances: MPs with between 6 and 15 years of service report the sharpest perception of rising violence, suggesting they can compare the present with earlier, less hostile contexts. Newer MPs, with fewer than five years in politics, are less likely to perceive change, which may indicate normalization of aggression or the absence of long-term reference points. Younger and older MPs stand out as the most likely to register an escalation, reflecting their different vulnerabilities – youth through intensive reliance on social media, elders through increased exposure to face-to-face hostility.

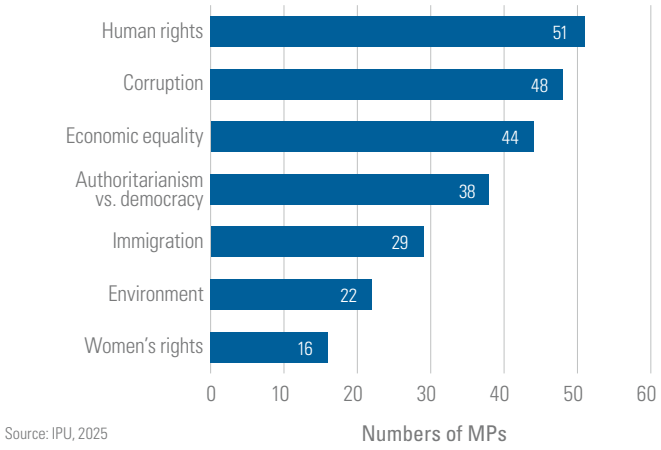
Figure 69. Perception of a rise of violence in the last five years



Source: IPU, 2025

The contexts in which violence intensifies in Malaysia further illuminate the functioning of the country's democracy. Parliamentary debates on legislation were cited most often (73.3%), confirming that violence escalates precisely when the deliberative function of parliament is most active. Corruption scandals (50%) and poverty-related disputes (44.4%) were also mentioned, revealing that moments of high political tension and distributive conflict are especially prone to hostility. Election periods, cited by 27.8%, also emerged as volatile moments, while issues such as corruption, economic equality and the environment were most frequently associated with surges in aggression.

Figure 70. Perceptions of issues triggering violence



Source: IPU, 2025

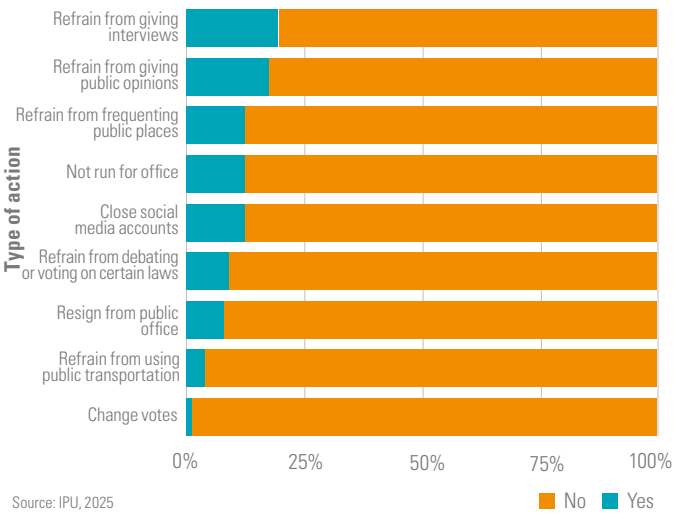
c. Personal impacts of violence

The consequences of political violence extend beyond individual MPs to affect the functioning of parliament as a whole. One third of respondents admitted to having self-censored, refraining from granting interviews, moderating their positions, or even reconsidering their votes out of fear of reprisals. This chilling effect erodes the independence of parliamentary debate and weakens the capacity of elected representatives to fulfil their democratic mandate.

"I have received threatening letters and jeers on social media, and my children have also received jeers on their social media."

Self-censorship represents one of the most corrosive impacts of political violence. Even when not physically silenced, MPs adapt their behaviour in anticipation of future attacks. This undermines the deliberative core of parliament, as representatives avoid contentious issues or soften critiques to minimize personal risk. The democratic cost is thus borne collectively, not only individually.

Figure 71. Have you considered these actions?



Source: IPU, 2025

The spillover effects are equally concerning. More than a third of MPs reported that their family members or friends had been targeted as a result of their political role, expanding the scope of intimidation beyond parliament and into private life.

"I am always analysing whether to quit because of the threats to my family."

The targeting of family members is particularly destabilizing in Asian cultural contexts, where familial responsibilities carry strong social weight. The psychological burden extends beyond MPs to their private lives, eroding trust and creating climates of fear in entire households. Internationally, such "second-order victimization" has been documented as a deliberate strategy to deter political engagement.

d. Mental health

The proportion of Malaysian MPs responding to the mental health and well-being questions (78 out of 292) cautions against interpretations of prevalence of symptoms. However, 21 of the 78 (27%) responding MPs did report a negative impact of their experience of violence (whether online or offline) on their mental health and quality of life (considered collectively as "well-being"). Of these MPs, two met the threshold for possible presence of a depressive disorder on the PHQ-2 measure, while five MPs stated they had sought professional help for their mental well-being. One MP stated: "I think one of the things that would work here is having a therapist available for MPs, who can guarantee confidentiality".

Personal and family impact of violence

Of the 21 MPs reporting a negative impact on their well-being, 19 highlighted experiences of stress, 9 indicated anxiety and 9 reported depression. Seven of these MPs declared they had insomnia, while none reported substance abuse.

There was a statistically significant association between experience of online violence and negative effects on MPs' well-being, with 91% of those reporting exposure to this also declaring a negative impact ($p = 0.028$). A similar – and statistically significant – association was found between offline violence and lowered well-being, with 62% of MPs reporting experiences of both ($p = 0.004$).

Among the 33 MPs who reported violence towards their families/friends, there was a high statistically significant association ($p < .001$) with increased reporting of negative effects on well-being (49%, i.e. 16 out of 33 MPs) than among MPs whose families/friends had not been targeted (8.8%, i.e. 5 out of 57 MPs).

Links between mental health impacts, political behaviour and daily routine

Five out of 21 MPs (24%) who reported a negative impact of violence on their well-being had considered not running for office (which was a statistically significant association – $p = 0.034$), including three who had considered resigning. Four out of 21 MPs (19%) reporting a negative impact on their well-being stated they had refrained from debating on certain laws, compared with only 4 out of 69 (5.8%) not reporting poorer well-being saying they had withdrawn from debating.

One MP declared they would change their vote due to pressure from violence.

As a result of violence, and in the presence of associated negative effects on their well-being, 6 out of 21 MPs (28.6%) had avoided giving their opinions in public and 7 out of 21 (33%) did not give interviews to journalists. The prevalence of the latter type of behaviour was significantly lower among MPs who did not report lowered well-being ($p = 0.033$).

Six out of 21 MPs (28.6%) who reported a negative impact of violence on their well-being said they refrained from frequenting public places, compared with 5.8% of MPs (4 out of 69) who had not reported a negative impact on their well-being ($p = 0.009$). Only one MP had stopped using public transport.

Four out of 21 MPs (19%) who reported lowered well-being took the step of closing their personal social media accounts, compared with 6 out of 69 (8.7%) who had not experienced such negative well-being effects.

While the sample of MPs is around one quarter of those sitting in the Parliament of Malaysia, there is evidence indicating potential relationships between experiences of offline and online violence and negative psychological and behavioural consequences. These potential relationships warrant further investigation.

The impact on individuals and their families and friends is of grave concern, as is the potential impact of experiences of exposure to violence – both online and offline – on MPs' mental well-being. For a smaller proportion of this sample, the results indicate additional relationships between violence and job performance, as well as between violence and public visibility.

e. Findings

The survey results demonstrate that political violence by the public in Malaysia is not a marginal phenomenon but a structural reality of parliamentary life. Seven in 10 MPs reported online aggression and more than 1 in 3 experienced offline attacks, with many noting that incidents occur on a monthly or even weekly basis. Violence thus cuts across parliamentary experience, age and geography, underscoring its embeddedness in daily political practice.

The disaggregated data reveal layered vulnerabilities. Women MPs reported higher exposure than their male colleagues both online and offline, and only women identified experiences of sexual harassment and dissemination of sexualized images. These qualitative distinctions underscore how political hostility intersects with patriarchal dynamics to produce gender-specific harms.

Similarly, MPs who identified themselves as belonging to disadvantaged groups – including ethnic and religious minorities, individuals from low-income backgrounds, and women naming gender itself as a source of marginalization – reported higher levels of online aggression. This disparity reflects how existing social inequalities compound political vulnerability. These findings resonate with entrenched cleavages in Malaysia: a political system historically structured around ethnic and religious hierarchies, with affirmative action policies privileging Malay Muslims, and where LGBTQIA+ individuals remain criminalized and stigmatized. The higher prevalence of online violence against MPs from disadvantaged backgrounds illustrates how societal prejudice is weaponized in the digital sphere, amplifying structural exclusion within political life.

By contrast, differences by age, parliamentary seniority or territorial representation were less consistent. Younger MPs tended to report more online violence, reflecting their heavier reliance on digital platforms, while longer-serving MPs more often faced offline aggression, possibly due to accumulated visibility in community-level politics. Territorial variation was limited, with one notable exception: MPs from urban constituencies were more likely to report online violence than their rural peers, highlighting how digital exposure concentrates risks in competitive and connected constituencies.

Patterns of perpetration confirm that violence is both anonymous and organized. MPs attributed hostility to ordinary citizens as well as to partisan digital accounts, reflecting the hybrid nature of Malaysian politics where grass-roots mobilization and orchestrated campaigns converge. The prominence of disinformation aligns with the country's electoral landscape, where platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp and TikTok have become central to campaigning, and coordinated networks have been documented in past elections.

Violence was described as peaking around corruption scandals, distributive disputes, human rights debates and electoral cycles – precisely the moments when democratic accountability is at stake. This politicized rhythm underscores that violence is not random but patterned around the country's contested political economy, where allegations of elite capture and resource distribution are highly sensitive flashpoints.

Equally concerning is the normalization of violence among MPs. Many parliamentarians described aggression as the "cost of doing politics," admitting to self-censorship or moderation of positions in response to threats. This resignation corrodes deliberation and undermines the independence of parliament. The attack on the son of Mr. Rafizi Ramli, a member of the House of Representatives, in August 2025 illustrates how intimidation can spill over into MPs' families,[8] signaling that the risks are not confined to rhetoric or online harassment but extend into physical threats designed to silence dissent.

Taken together, these findings portray a political environment where violence is widespread, intersectional and normalized. It threatens not only individual MPs but also the institutional integrity of parliament, weakening the country's democratic consolidation and constraining the space for inclusive and equal representation.

8 On 13 August 2025, the 12-year-old son of Mr. Ramli, a Malaysian MP and former minister of the economy, was shot with a syringe in the parking lot of a shopping mall, in what he characterized as a planned attempt to scare him and quiet his political activities. Two masked men on a motorbike apprehended his wife and son, injecting the youngster with a sharp object. The family had also received anonymous threats, one of which read "Be silent. If you continue, AIDS", accompanied by syringe emojis. Although the child's initial medical checks revealed no apparent problems, he remains under supervision.

In the Netherlands, the House of Representatives can propose and amend laws, while the Senate reviews their validity within Dutch legislation. © Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal

The Netherlands

1. Context

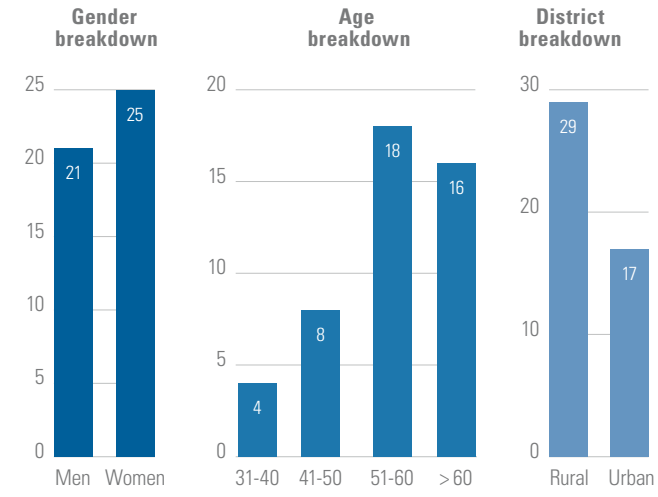
The Netherlands is a constitutional monarchy with a parliamentary system. The monarch acts mainly as a symbolic Head of State, while the prime minister leads the government. Legislative power is shared between the States General (parliament) and the executive, reflecting a non-traditional separation of powers.

The States General is composed of the House of Representatives and the Senate. The House can propose and amend laws, while the Senate reviews their validity within Dutch legislation. The chambers currently have 150 representatives and 75 senators, respectively.

Elections are held every four years, with citizens voting for political parties rather than individual candidates. The 150 seats in the House of Representatives are distributed according to the results, after which members must form a coalition and elect a prime minister. The entire country is a single electoral district, though for administrative purposes it is divided into 20 parliamentary regions ("*kieskringen*"), each covering a province or part of one. Senators are elected indirectly by provincial councillors through proportional representation immediately after provincial council elections.

2. Survey results

Figure 72. The Netherlands - Sample breakdown



Source: IPU, 2025

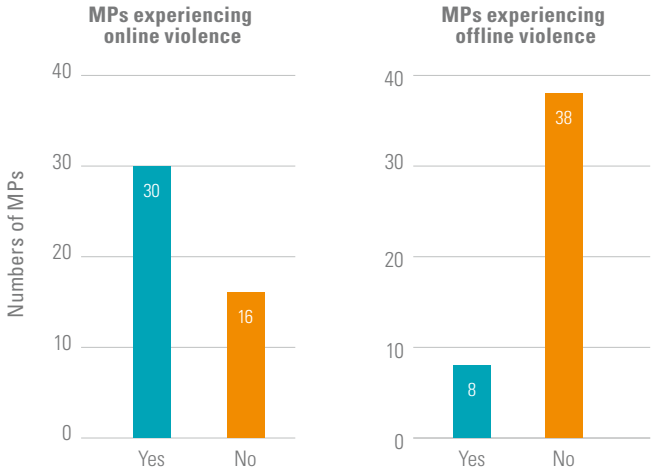
The survey was carried out between March and July 2025 among all members of the House of Representatives and the Senate, with a response rate of 20.44% (46 of 225). Among respondents, 25 were women (54.35%) and 21 were men (45.65%). In terms of age, 39.13% were over age 51 and 34.78% over age 60. A majority – 73% – represented predominantly rural districts.

a. Incidence of violence in the last year

According to the results, 65.2% of respondents (30 out of 46) reported experiencing online or digital violence in the past year, while 17.3% reported physical incidents.

"I got online threats to set fire to our house."

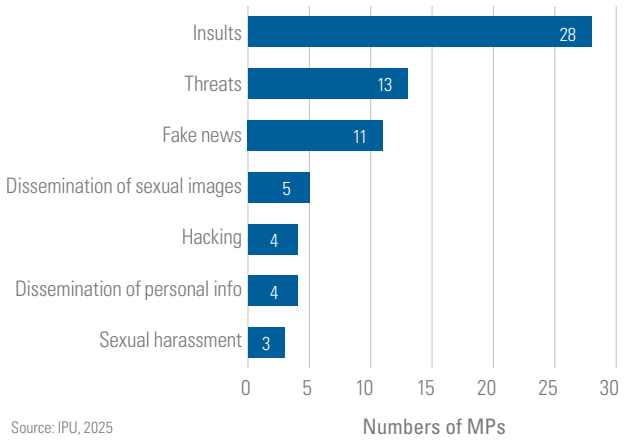
Figure 73. MPs experiencing violence in the last year



Source: IPU, 2025

Insults and threats were the most common forms of online violence reported by MPs in the past year. Overall, 60.8% of respondents (28 out of 46) experienced insults, and 28.2% received threats. Other reported abuses included the spread of fake news (23.9%), sexualized images (10.8%), hacking or doxxing (8.6%), and sexual harassment (6.5%). Most of the affected MPs (24 out of 32) said these incidents occurred at least monthly, pointing to a pattern of ongoing rather than isolated violence. The survey also showed that many endured multiple forms simultaneously: of the 30 who faced online violence, 19 reported two or more types, while half of those subjected to offline violence experienced more than one form in the past year. This recurrence highlights the need to view online violence as a persistent threat to MPs' safety and political participation, rather than as isolated incidents.

Figure 74. Type of online violence experienced by MPs

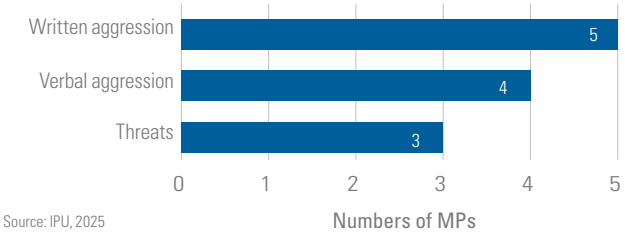


Source: IPU, 2025

"I receive frequent verbal abuse and threats via my business email and social media."

In the physical environment, written aggression was the most common form of violence in the past year (reported by 5 out of 8 respondents), followed by verbal aggression (4) and threats (3). The results show that several respondents experienced more than one type of offline violence during the period. All also reported facing at least one incident in most months.

Figure 75. Type of offline violence experienced by MPs



Source: IPU, 2025

"Someone sent me letters containing direct death threats and images of firearms, gravestones or a funeral cross."

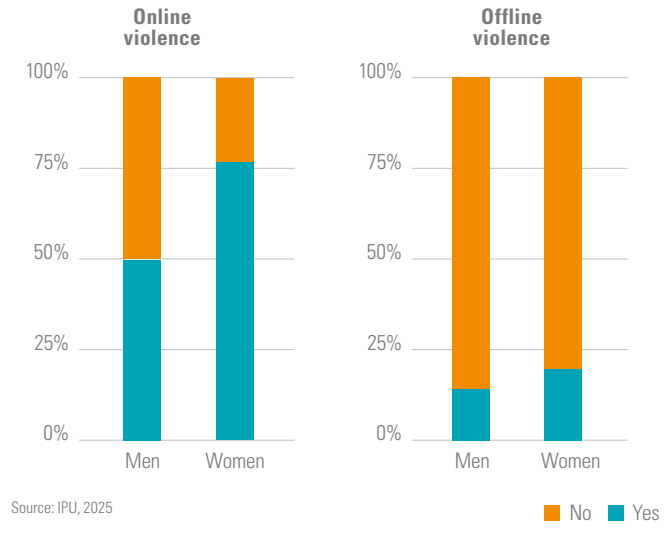
a.1. Disaggregated results

- **Gender**

Gender-based differences in political violence are clear in the Netherlands. Among the 25 women MPs surveyed, 76% (19 out of 25) reported experiencing online violence in the past year, compared with 52.4% (11 out of 21) of male MPs. This gap indicates that women parliamentarians are more frequently targeted in digital spaces. A similar pattern emerged offline: 20% of women (5 out of 25) reported physical violence, versus 14.3% of men (3 out of 21).

Although the sample is relatively small, these results mirror international research showing that women are disproportionately targeted, particularly in online environments.

Figure 76. MPs experiencing violence, by gender

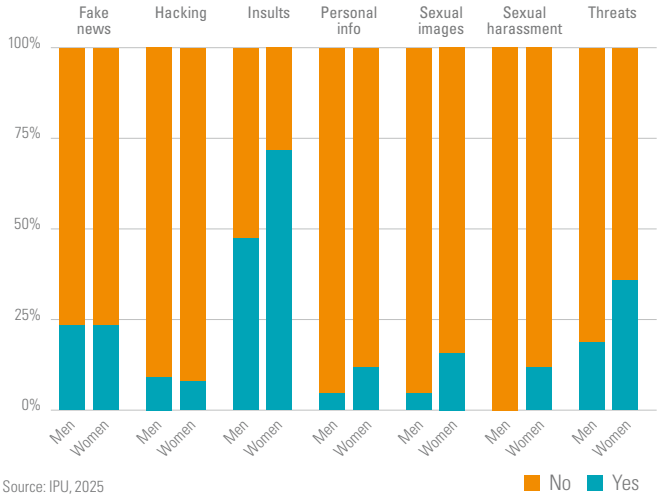


Source: IPU, 2025

"Someone created fake pornography involving me using AI."

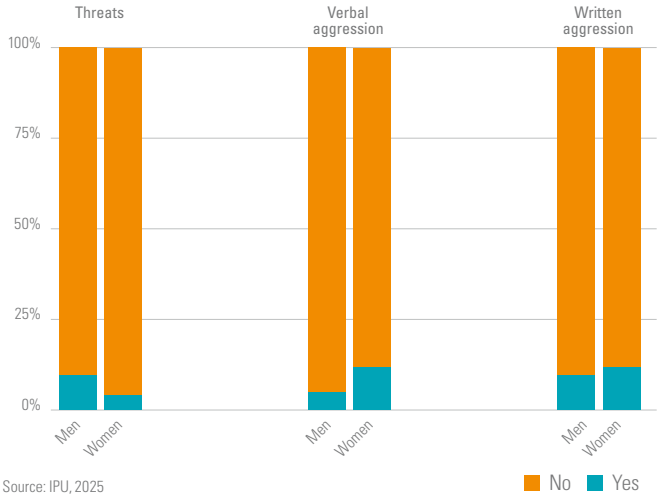
For both male and female MPs, the most common forms of online violence were insults, threats and the spread of fake news. At first glance, responses appear evenly distributed across genders. However, the disaggregated data reveal key differences: only women reported experiencing online sexual harassment, highlighting a gender-specific form of violence, and more women than men reported insults and threats.

Figure 77. Types of online violence, by gender of the MP



Source: IPU, 2025

Figure 78. Types of offline violence, by gender of the MP



Source: IPU, 2025

An analysis of the overlap between different types of violence over the past year shows clear gender distinctions. Women MPs reported greater exposure to multiple forms of online abuse. While both men and women most often experienced one or two types, four women reported up to five types simultaneously – a concentration not seen among men. Male respondents reported no more than four types, with most experiencing between one and three. This indicates that online violence against women is not only more frequent but also more intense and varied.

In contrast, though fewer in number overall, incidents of physical violence showed the opposite trend: male MPs were more likely than women to report experiencing two types of offline violence at once, whereas most women reported only one. However, the small number of offline cases warrants caution in interpreting these findings.

Although women reported higher rates of both online and offline political violence, Fisher's exact tests found no statistically significant association between gender and victimization ($p = 0.117$ for online; $p = 0.437$ for offline). The odds ratios likewise show uncertainty in estimating the strength of any gender effect. These results suggest that, despite apparent differences, the sample size and variability limit firm conclusions. Larger studies are needed to clarify gender dynamics in political violence.

It is important to note that these findings are descriptive and based on self-reported data from a non-randomized sample of 46 MPs. They should not be considered representative of all parliamentarians in the Netherlands. Nonetheless, they provide useful indicative evidence of gendered patterns in political violence.

Figure 79. Coexistence of different types of violence, by gender

Source: IPU, 2025

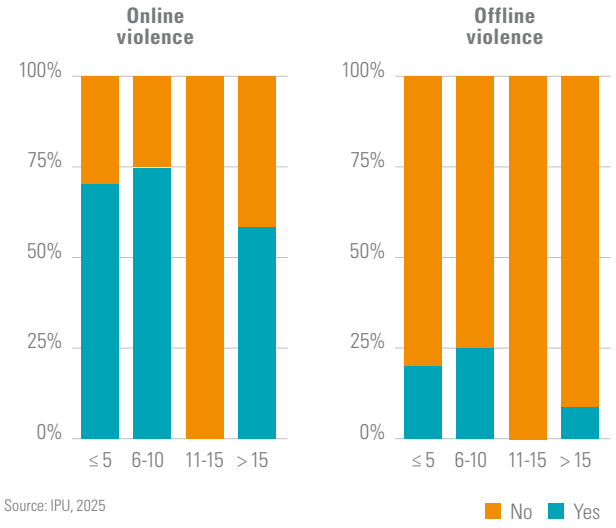
"There is mainly a constant stream of verbal abuse, aggression and intimidation via social media."

- **Years in politics and age**

Among those surveyed, 45% had 5 years or less of political experience; 26% had between 6 and 10 years; 4% between 11 and 15 years; and 24% more than 15 years.

The data show that both online and offline violence are reported across all levels of political seniority, with no clear link between years in office and exposure to violence. Since the findings are self-reported and cross-sectional, it is not possible to determine whether political experience acts as a protective or risk factor. Larger, stratified studies are needed to assess any association between tenure and exposure to violence.

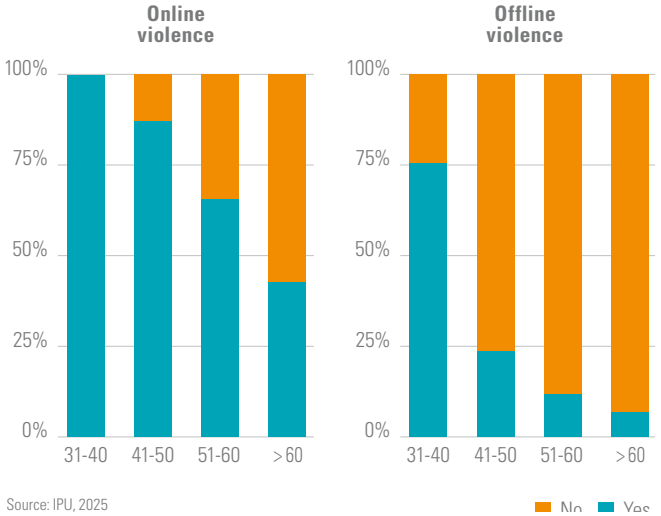
Figure 80. MPs experiencing violence, by their years in politics



Source: IPU, 2025

Fisher's exact tests found no statistically significant link between political experience and reported violence, either online (p = 0.28) or offline (p = 0.83). This suggests that length of tenure alone does not predict exposure in this sample. While newer politicians (≤10 years of experience) appeared to report more incidents, the lack of significance indicates that other factors – such as role, visibility or demographics – may better explain the variation. Future research with larger samples and more detailed variables could help clarify the relationship between political experience and vulnerability to violence.

Figure 81. MPs experiencing violence, by age group



Source: IPU, 2025

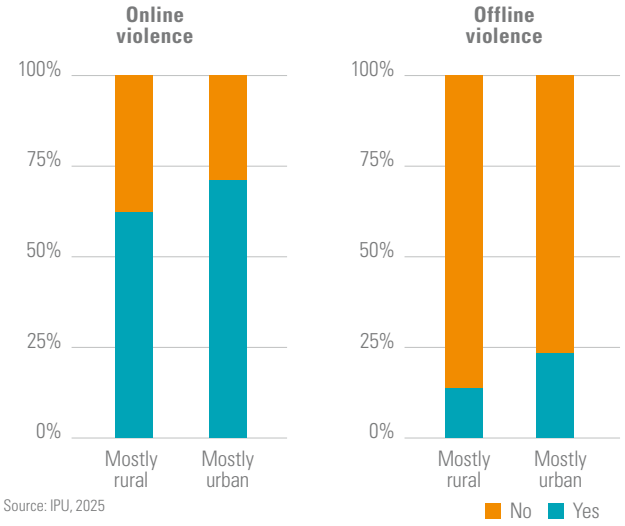
As noted earlier, 33.13% of respondents were between 31 and 50 years old, 50% between 51 and 60 years old, and the remainder over age 60.

No statistically significant link was found between age and experiences of violence, either online (p = 0.107) or offline (p = 0.072). Still, some patterns stand out. Online violence was reported more often by MPs under age 50, with incidence decreasing steadily with age. Offline violence followed a sharper trend: 3 out of 4 MPs under age 40 reported it, compared with only 1 out of 16 of MPs over age 60. While not statistically conclusive, these tendencies may suggest generational differences in exposure, digital practices or vulnerability to political violence.

- **Urban and rural districts**

This case differs from the others analysed: 73.04% of respondents reported representing predominantly rural districts.

Figure 82. MPs experiencing violence, by type of district



Source: IPU, 2025

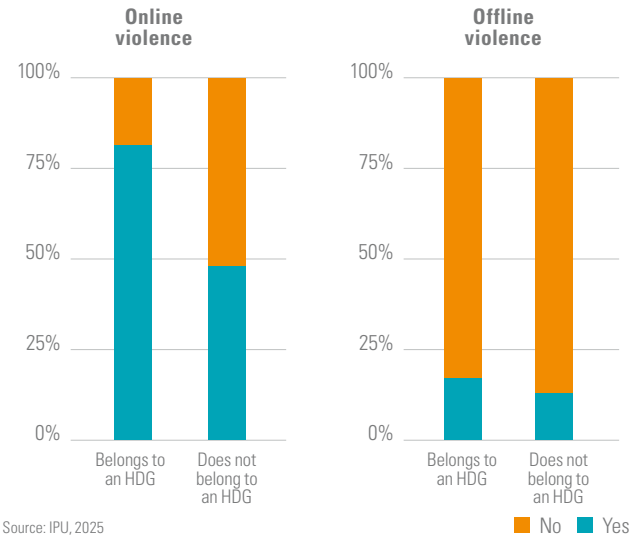
Despite category imbalances, the results show a similar impact of online and offline violence across environments. Fisher's exact tests confirmed no statistically significant link between MPs' district type (urban or rural) and experiences of political violence, either online (p = 0.752) or offline (p = 0.686). A descriptive view suggests violence – particularly online – was reported slightly more often by MPs from urban districts, though the difference was modest (70.6% urban versus 62.1% rural for online; 23.5% versus 13.8% for offline). Wide confidence intervals indicate that territorial context is not a decisive factor in this sample. This should also be read in light of the Dutch electoral system, in which lower house members are elected nationally in a single district, without direct constituency ties to specific urban or rural areas.

- **Belonging to HDGs**

Of the respondents, 47.8% answered "yes" to belonging to an HDG, 50% answered "no", and 2.2% did not respond. The data suggest that MPs from HDGs face higher rates of online violence: 81.8% (18 out of 22) reported such experiences, compared with 47.8% (11 out of 23) of non-HDG MPs. In contrast, offline violence rates were similar across groups – 18.2% (4 out of 22) for HDG members and 13.0% (3 out of 23) for non-members – showing little difference.

These descriptive findings are supported by Fisher's exact test, which showed a statistically significant association between HDG identification and online violence (p = 0.0287). The odds ratio of 4.73 (95% CI: 1.08–25.41) indicates that MPs identifying as HDG members were more than four times as likely to report online violence as their non-HDG counterparts. No significant association was found for offline violence (p = 0.6995).

Figure 83. Violence against MPs from historically disadvantaged groups

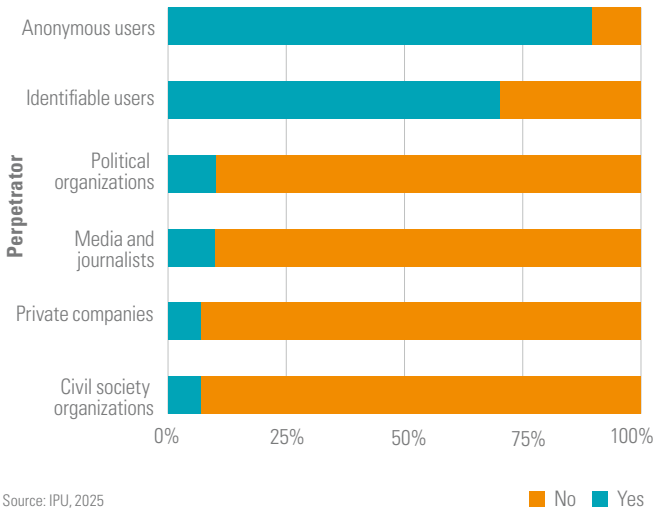


Source: IPU, 2025

a.2. Who is perpetrating the violence?

In the online environment, most respondents identified anonymous users as the main source of abuse, followed by identifiable users. This suggests that while anonymity can encourage impunity and aggression, it is not required for online violence to occur. A smaller but still notable share attributed attacks to political organizations and media actors, while private companies and civil society groups were mentioned only marginally.

Figure 84. Perpetrators of online violence

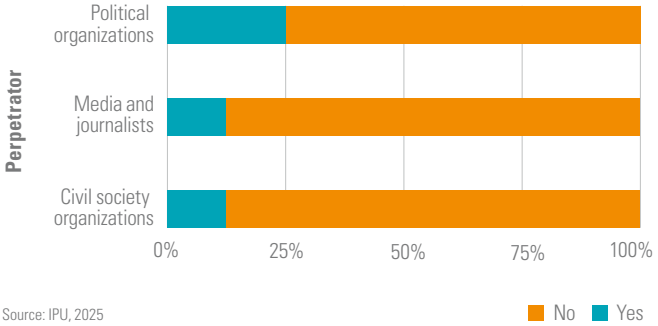


Source: IPU, 2025

"As a result of fake news spreading through state media channels, I have been threatened in writing with serious physical violence."

For offline violence, a different pattern emerged. Political organizations were the most frequently identified perpetrators, followed by media and journalists, and then civil society organizations. Notably, no respondents cited citizens as perpetrators – a contrast with other national case studies, which may reflect contextual differences in how MPs interpret or classify sources of threat in the physical environment.[9]

Figure 85. Perpetrators of offline violence



Source: IPU, 2025

b. Perceptions about violence

b.1. Normalization of violence

According to the findings, 59.1% of MPs disagreed with the statement "violence is the cost of doing politics," 32.6% agreed, and 8.3% either responded "don't know" or gave no answer. Overall, most MPs do not see violence as an inherent part of political life.

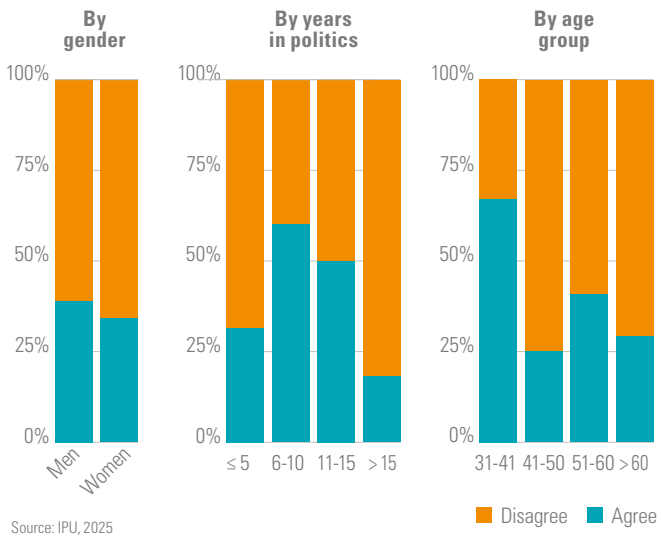
By gender, normalization levels showed little variation: men and women expressed largely similar views. By years in politics, however, differences emerged. MPs with between 6 and 15 years of experience were most likely to agree with the statement, while those with more than 15 years of experience agreed far less. This non-linear trend suggests normalization may peak mid-career – perhaps reflecting greater exposure or adaptation – before declining in later stages.

Age data reveal a similar tendency. The youngest group (31–40 years) showed the highest agreement, with normalization decreasing steadily among older cohorts. Although the data are cross-sectional and descriptive, they may reflect generational differences in perceptions of political violence, shaped by tolerance levels, sociopolitical context, media exposure and online engagement.[10]

9 From a methodological perspective, it is important to highlight that these results are based on perceived attribution and may reflect respondents' subjective interpretations rather than confirmed sources. Additionally, the format of the question allowed for multiple responses, so categories are not mutually exclusive.

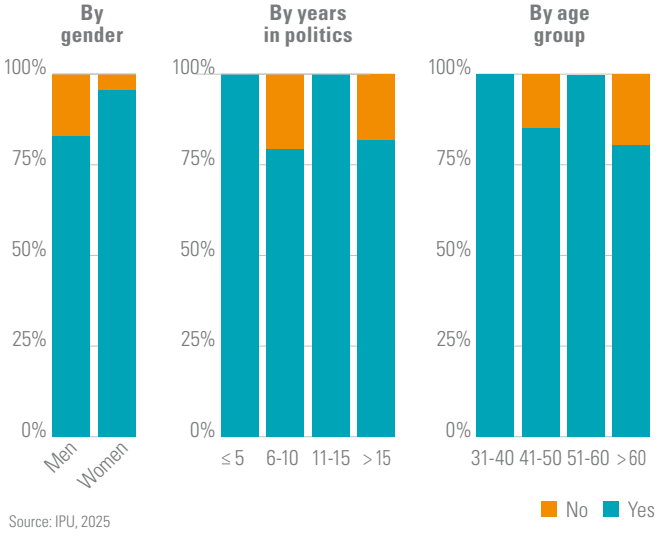
10 This question measures views of normality rather than actual exposure to, or acceptance of, violence. Recall bias, social desirability effects and different interpretations of the message can all impact responses. These statistics provide no basis for drawing causal inferences.

Figure 86. Violence is a cost of doing politics



Source: IPU, 2025

Figure 87. Perception of a rise of violence in the last five years



Source: IPU, 2025

b.2. Increase in violence

When MPs were asked whether political violence had increased in recent years, the results were striking: about 80% of respondents said "yes", only 6.5% said "no", and 13.5% either answered "don't know" or left the question blank. Overall, most MPs perceive political violence as having intensified, regardless of its form or circumstances.

Disaggregated results by gender, experience and age provide further detail. Women MPs were slightly more likely than men to report an increase, though the difference was small. Greater variation appeared across levels of political experience: MPs with between 6 and 10 years of experience and those with over 15 years in office were less likely to see an escalation than colleagues in earlier or mid-career stages. This pattern may reflect cohort effects or differences in exposure over time.

MPs aged 31–40 years and 51–60 years were the most likely to say violence had grown. Although no clear linear trend emerges, these peaks may signal greater exposure among younger, digital-native MPs and mid-career parliamentarians – groups that international research links to heightened sensitivity to online hostility and political animosity.

Nonetheless, the broad agreement across demographic groups points to a shared perception among Dutch MPs that political safety is deteriorating.

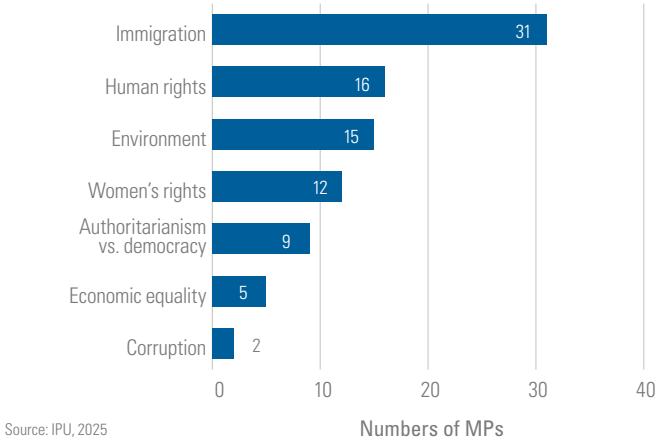
b.3. Contexts and topics that favour violence

Most respondents (63%) said violence tends to rise when specific laws are debated, while 45.6% pointed to electoral periods as high-risk moments. By contrast, very few believed that corruption cases trigger violence, suggesting such scandals are seen as less polarizing or as less directly targeting MPs.

When asked whether certain topics or policy areas trigger political violence, 67.3% of MPs answered "yes", 17.3% said "no", and the rest either did not know or gave no response. Among those answering "yes", the most frequently cited issue was immigration (31 respondents), followed by human rights (16), environmental issues (15) and women's rights (12). These results suggest that violence is perceived to escalate around issues that are publicly contentious and ideologically divisive.

The prominence of migration as a perceived trigger reflects broader dynamics in the Netherlands: the rise of anti-immigration parties, their stronger presence in parliament and polarized media narratives around the issue. Migration thus acts as a symbolic fault line, channelling anxieties about identity, sovereignty and national cohesion. Likewise, the prominence of human rights, gender equality and environmental issues suggests that violence is often seen as a reaction to progressive or rights-based agendas, which tend to provoke resistance in polarized contexts.

Figure 88. Perceptions of issues triggering violence



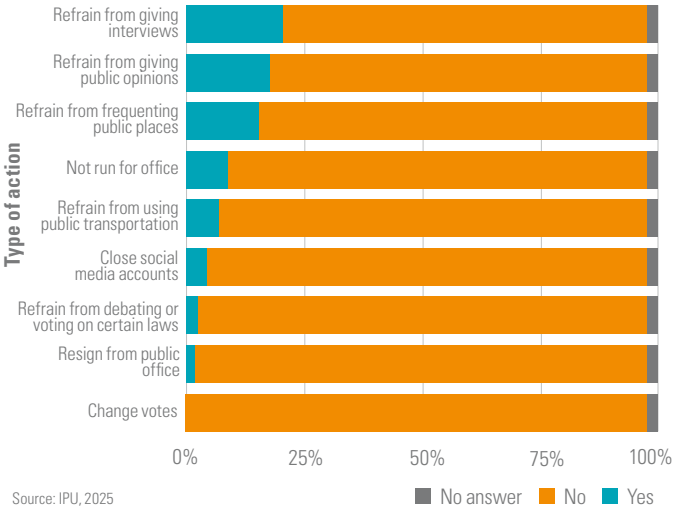
Source: IPU, 2025

c. Personal impacts of violence

Slightly more than half of respondents said they had not considered changing their behaviour or decisions in response to political violence, suggesting that many MPs resist self-censorship despite facing threats or harassment.

The rest reported having considered such changes. The most common actions were refusing interviews or deactivating social media accounts, followed by avoiding public statements. These partial withdrawals from the public sphere may reflect efforts to limit visibility or reduce exposure, especially online, where threats and harassment are more persistent and harder to control.

Figure 89. Have you considered these actions?



Source: IPU, 2025

Less common activities also carry serious repercussions. A small number of MPs reported considering not running for office, avoiding public transport, resigning or even refusing to debate or vote on certain bills. Though rare, the very fact these options were mentioned is methodologically significant, as it suggests violence may undermine core democratic functions such as free speech, representative autonomy and legislative participation.[11]

In addition, only 17.3% of respondents reported episodes of violence against family or friends, while 80.4% said they had not experienced such episodes.

d. Mental health

The proportion of Dutch MPs who responded to the mental health and well-being questions (46 out of 225) is small, limiting conclusions about prevalence. However, 11 out of 46 respondents (23.9%) reported that violence – online or offline – had negatively affected their mental health and quality of life. Of these, only one MP reached the PHQ-2 threshold for possible depressive disorder, and none reported seeking professional help.

Personal and family impact of violence

Of the 30 MPs who reported experiencing one or more forms of violence, 10 (33%) also reported a negative impact on their well-being, while the remaining MPs did not report such effects. This indicates that exposure to violence can have adverse psychological consequences, particularly when MPs experience both online and offline forms of violence. Similarly, 4 out of 8 (50%) who reported offline violence said it affected their mental health, compared with 7 out of 37 (18.9%) who reported poor mental health without exposure to offline violence. These patterns suggest that experiences of violence – whether online or offline – heighten the likelihood of a negative psychological effect.

Among the 11 MPs reporting harm to well-being, 7 cited stress, 2 reported anxiety and 3 said they had experienced both. Two mentioned insomnia, and one reported substance abuse, potentially linked to exposure to multiple forms of violence from different sources.

Family-targeted violence also had a marked effect: 4 out of 8 MPs (50%) who reported violence against relatives or friends described negative effects on their well-being, compared with 4 of 37 (10.8%) whose families or friends had not been targeted.

Links between mental health impact, political behaviour and daily routine

Although the numbers were small, at least half of the MPs who reported negative effects on their well-being also reported an impact on their political behaviour. Two out of three MPs in this group had considered not running for office, including one who had considered resigning. Only one MP said they had refrained from debating, and none reported changing their vote due to violence.

11 This question only captures self-reported pondering, not actual behavioural change. Nonetheless, these findings offer helpful information about the psychological and institutional costs of political violence, as well as its ability to skew democratic discourse.

As a result of violence, some MPs avoided public engagement: seven refrained from expressing opinions in public, eight avoided giving interviews, and at least half of these also reported negative effects on well-being.

Effects also extended into daily life. Two out of 4 MPs (50%) who reported negative effects on well-being refrained from frequenting public places, compared with 2 out of 37 (5%) who had not reported such effects. Two MPs avoided public transport, while eight closed their personal social media accounts – three of whom also reported negative impacts on their well-being.

Although the sample is small, the findings point to potential links between violence (both online and offline) and negative psychological and behavioural outcomes. The consequences affect not only MPs themselves but also their families and friends. For some, the results also suggest impacts on job performance and public visibility, underscoring the need for further investigation into how political violence undermines both personal well-being and democratic functioning.

e. Parliament's response

Among surveyed MPs, 38 said parliament had an institutional channel for reporting incidents, 5 said it did not and 3 gave no answer. Of those who acknowledged such a channel, 44.7% reported using it, and 94.1% of these MPs said they had received an appropriate response.

f. Findings

The survey found that 65.2% of respondents reported experiencing online violence by the public in the past year, compared with 17.3% who reported incidents in the physical environment. As in other case studies, this shows that political violence is more widespread in digital spaces. Online, insults and threats were the most common forms, while offline, written aggression was reported most frequently.

Clear gender differences emerged. Among the 25 women MPs surveyed, 76% reported online violence in the past year, compared with 52.4% of the 21 men. Only women reported online sexual harassment, highlighting a gender-specific type of violence. Women also reported experiencing insults and threats more often than men.

The survey also found that 47.8% of respondents identified as part of an HDG, and 81.8% of these MPs reported online violence, compared with 47.8% of non-HDG MPs. Offline violence rates were similar: 18.2% for HDG members and 13.0% for non-members.

Respondents said most online violence came from anonymous users. Offline, however, political organizations were identified as the main perpetrators, followed by media, journalists, and civil society organizations.

When asked about the statement "violence is the cost of doing politics", 59.1% disagreed, showing that most MPs do not see violence as unavoidable. Notably, the youngest age group (31–40 years) showed the highest level of agreement, while normalization declined with older cohorts.

Eighty per cent of respondents said they believed political violence had increased in recent years, and 63% indicated it tends to rise when specific laws are debated. Immigration was the issue most often cited as triggering violence, followed by other divisive topics. Unlike other case studies, this makes migration stand out as a particularly European concern.

More than half of MPs said political violence had not caused them to change their positions or censor themselves, suggesting a degree of resistance to intimidation.

Finally, the Netherlands was one of the few case studies where MPs said Parliament had an effective complaints channel. Most reported using it and receiving an appropriate response.

VI. Global survey

To complement the five in-depth national case studies, a condensed version of the original survey – reduced to 10 key questions – was developed and deployed worldwide. The aim of this global survey was to capture broader tendencies and patterns of political violence against MPs, beyond the details of individual country cases.

From the IPU database of roughly 12,000 current and former parliamentarians, 3,390 contacts were randomly selected. Sampling was stratified by region and gender. To ensure representativeness, gender and regional weights were applied using aggregated data from the Parline database, which provides official demographic information on MPs worldwide. This adjustment corrected for over- or underrepresentation in the data set, producing results more reflective of the global composition of parliaments.

Region	Current number of MPs	% Current MPs	Women MPs	% Women MPs	Men MPs	% Men MPs
Americas	5849	13.17%	2011	16.76%	3687	11.51%
Asia	10613	23.89%	2326	19.38%	8224	25.68%
Europe	12728	28.66%	4043	33.69%	8684	27.11%
Middle East and North Africa	4475	10.08%	740	6.17%	3565	11.13%
Pacific	860	1.94%	200	1.67%	659	2.06%
Sub-Saharan Africa	9891	22.27%	2682	22.35%	7209	22.51%
Total	44416	100.00%	12002	100.00%	32028	100.00%

Source: IPU, Parline database (accessed 25 March 2025)

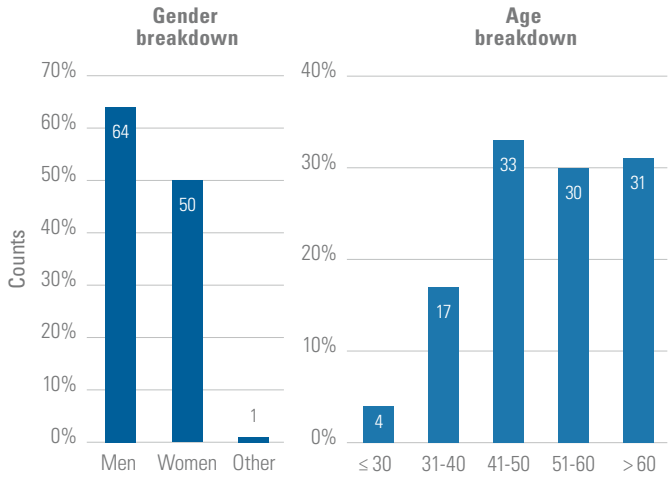
Survey responses were analysed to identify global patterns of political violence and compared with trends from the national case studies.

As the study relies on voluntary participation, there is a risk of self-selection bias: MPs who have experienced violence may be more inclined to respond, while others may withhold responses due to fear or stigma. The extent of this bias cannot be determined in advance. Thus, while the data provide valuable insights into patterns of political violence, caution is needed when interpreting prevalence and intensity across the entire population of MPs.

The next section presents the key findings of the global survey.

Analysis of the global survey

Figure 90. Global survey



Source: IPU, 2025

The survey received 115 responses: 64 respondents identified as men, 50 as women and one as "other", indicating some gender diversity beyond binary categories. Although men slightly outnumbered women, the share of female respondents (43.5%) is well above the global parliamentary average of 27% reported by the IPU.

The age profile broadly reflects global parliamentary demographics. Only 4 respondents were age 30 or younger, 17 were between 31 and 40 years, 33 were between 41 and 50 years, 30 were between 51 and 60 years, and 31 were over age 60. According to IPU data, just 2.79% of MPs worldwide are age 30 or younger and 19.1% are age 40 or younger, making these results consistent with global trends.

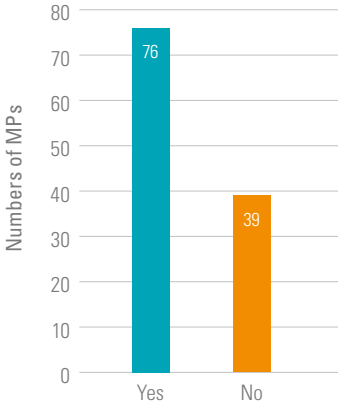
Given the small, self-selected sample, however, no firm conclusions can be drawn about representativeness in terms of gender or age.

- **Prevalence of violence against respondents**

The majority of respondents (76 out of 115) reported experiencing some form of violence – online or offline – by the public during their political careers, while 39 stated they had not. This means that more than two thirds of MPs surveyed had been affected, underscoring the prevalence of political violence.

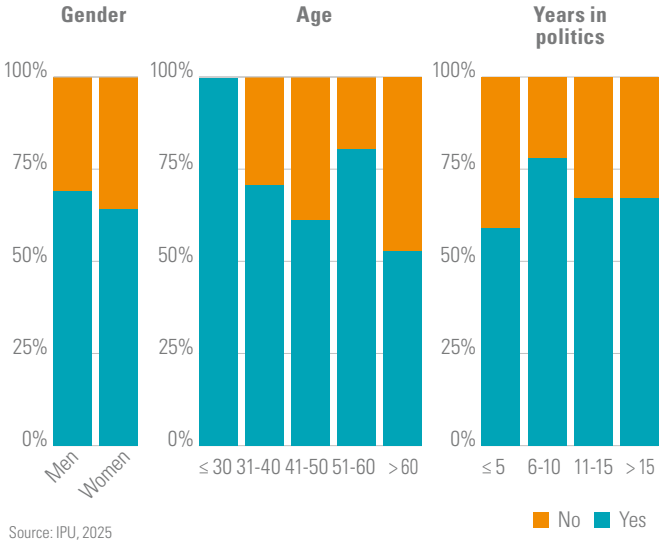
These findings align with earlier research documenting the rising risks faced by elected officials worldwide and highlight the urgent need for institutional protection, support systems and preventive measures.

Figure 91. MPs experiencing violence



Source: IPU, 2025

Figure 92. MPs experiencing violence (by gender, age and years in politics)



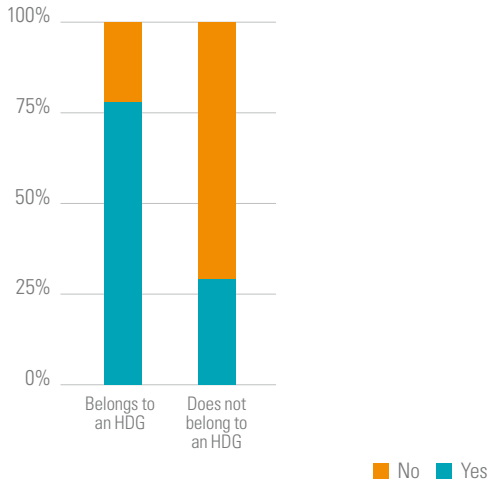
Source: IPU, 2025

- **Experience of violence according to respondents' gender**

Men and women reported experiencing political violence at broadly comparable rates: just over 70% of men and slightly fewer women indicated exposure during their political careers. While the prevalence appears similar, these figures do not reveal differences in the nature, severity or impact of violence – areas that require deeper qualitative investigation.

When focusing on women who identify as part of HDGs – whether on the basis of gender or other intersecting identities – the prevalence of violence rises sharply. Among these women, 28 reported experiencing violence compared to only 8 who did not, while women outside these groups more often reported no violence (10 versus 4).

Figure 93. Violence among women MPs identifying as part of a minority



Source: IPU, 2025

This contrast underscores the importance of applying an intersectional lens in analysing political violence, as it reveals patterns concealed in aggregate data.

- **Experience of violence according to respondents' years in politics**

Disaggregating by years in politics reveals clear variation in exposure to violence. Among MPs with five years or less in politics, just over half (27 out of 46, ~59%) reported experiencing violence. The share rises sharply among those with between 6 and 10 years in office, with 21 out of 27 (~78%) affected. For MPs with between 11 and 15 years and those with more than 15 years in politics, the prevalence remains high at about 67% (10 out of 15, and 18 out of 27, respectively).

These results suggest a positive association between political tenure and exposure to violence, indicating that longer time in office may heighten MPs' visibility – and with it, their vulnerability to targeted aggression.

- **Experience of violence according to respondents' age**

Analysis by age group reveals distinct patterns. All four respondents aged 30 or younger reported experiencing violence, suggesting that younger legislators may be especially vulnerable – or more willing to disclose such experiences. Nearly three quarters of those aged 31–40 years reported violence, but the rate drops to about 60% among respondents aged 41–50 years. It rises again in the 51–60 age group, where roughly four in five reported incidents, before falling back to just over half among respondents over age 60.

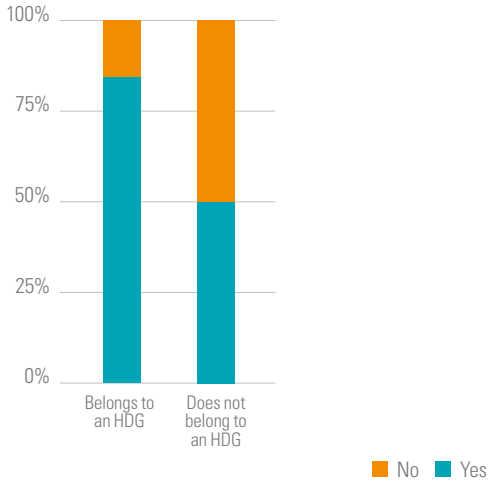
These trends may reflect generational or cohort effects in exposure, attitudes or reporting practices, as well as differences in visibility and public participation across age groups.

- **Violence experienced by respondents identifying as members of HDGs**

Of the 115 respondents, 52 identified as belonging to one or more HDGs. Most (38) identified with a single group, while 15 reported memberships in two or more – highlighting the intersectional nature of their experiences.

A clear disparity emerges in exposure to violence. Among MPs identifying with HDGs, 44 reported experiencing violence and only 8 did not. By contrast, responses from MPs outside these groups were nearly evenly divided, with 32 reporting violence and 31 not.

Figure 94. Violence among MPs belonging to historically disadvantaged groups



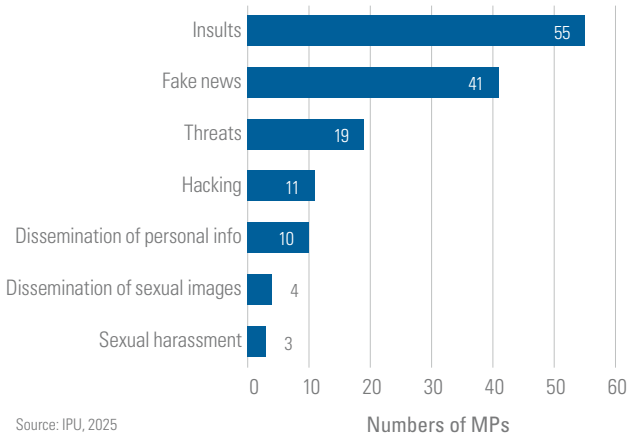
Source: IPU, 2025

Over 84% of HDG-associated MPs in the sample reported experiencing violence – a rate far higher than that of their non-minority counterparts. This disparity underscores the intersectional nature of political violence, showing how institutional inequalities beyond gender and age critically shape exposure to harm.

These results echo broader patterns in both online and offline contexts, where individuals who are more visible, vocal or marginalized – by race, ethnicity, religion, disability or other factors – are disproportionately targeted. They also highlight the need for intersectional protection frameworks that address not only general vulnerability, but the compounded risks faced by minority MPs in political life.

- **Types of online and offline violence experienced by respondents**

Figure 95. Types of online violence experienced by MPs

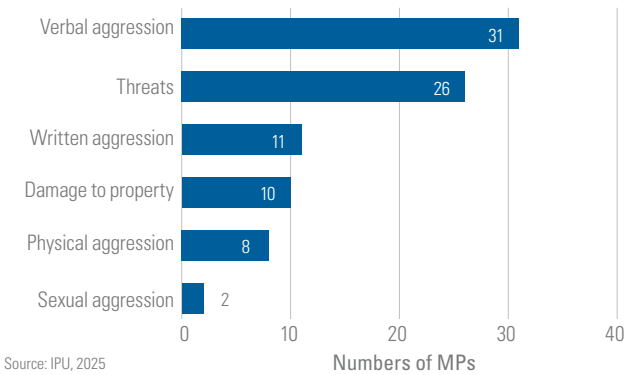


Source: IPU, 2025

Insults emerged as the most prevalent form of online violence, reported by 55 legislators. This was followed by the spread of fake news (41 respondents), showing how reputational attacks and disinformation are widely used to target MPs in digital spaces. Nineteen respondents reported threats, underscoring the severe – and sometimes lethal – potential of online aggression. Less frequent but still significant were hacking (11), the dissemination of personal information (10), and gendered or sexualized abuses such as the circulation of sexual photographs (4) and sexual harassment (3). Together, these findings confirm the widespread nature of online abuse and highlight a spectrum of harms – ranging from reputational damage and verbal assaults to direct threats – that demand tailored responses and safeguards.

Offline violence showed a similar pattern. Verbal hostility was the most common form, reported by 31 respondents, followed closely by threats (26). Written aggression (11) and property destruction (10) illustrate the tangible manifestations of political animosity. Physical hostility was reported by eight MPs, while only two mentioned incidents of sexual aggression. Although less common, these extreme forms pose serious risks to personal safety and require particular attention. Overall, offline violence, like online abuse, is primarily verbal or psychological but can escalate into material and physical harm. Taken together, the data depict a volatile environment in which MPs face multiple and often overlapping forms of digital and physical assault.

Figure 96. Types of offline violence experienced by MPs



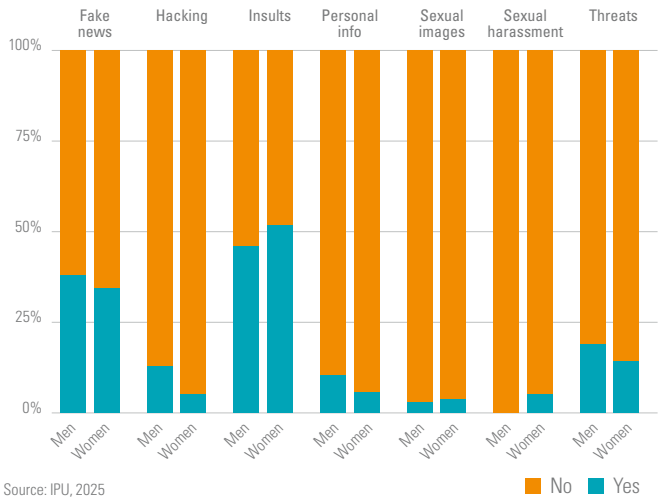
Source: IPU, 2025

The gender-disaggregated study reveals significant disparities in the forms and types of violence experienced by female and male respondents. With a few notable exceptions, women MPs report considerably lower rates of most types of violence than their male counterparts. For example, female MPs report somewhat greater rates of verbal and written hostility offline (types of violence that frequently precede or accompany more serious threats). Furthermore, women are more likely to report sexual harassment, the spread of sexual pictures, and sexual aggressiveness, which are almost non-existent in male answers. This emphasizes the gendered dimension of particular forms of political violence, as well as the specific manner in which women are targeted.

In contrast, male MPs report greater levels of almost every type of online violence, including fake news, hacking, threats and insults, which are frequently connected to reputational harm and political delegitimization. They also report more frequent incidents of physical hostility, property destruction, and threats in offline settings. This might indicate more exposure owing to public awareness or differing reporting limits.

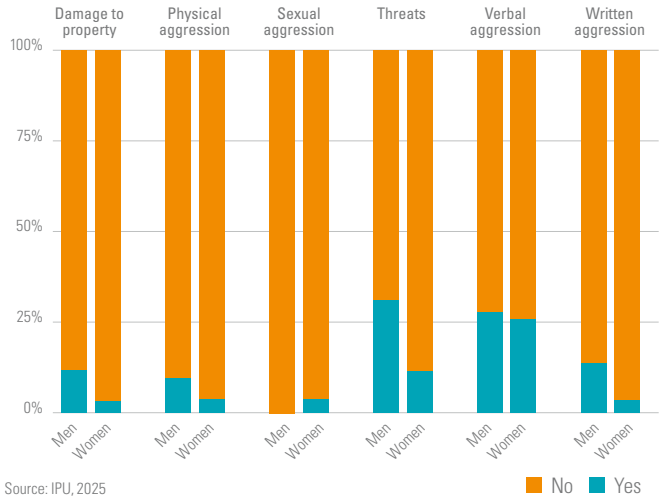
Taken together, these data reveal a clear gendered pattern: women encounter more personalized, sexualized and identity-based violence, whereas men are more likely to report forms of violence associated with political animosity, digital manipulation and public confrontation. These findings reinforce the need for gender-sensitive approaches to recording and managing violence against MPs, noting that the incidence and character of these assaults vary in ways that reflect wider societal and political power relations.

Figure 97. Types of online violence, by gender of the MP



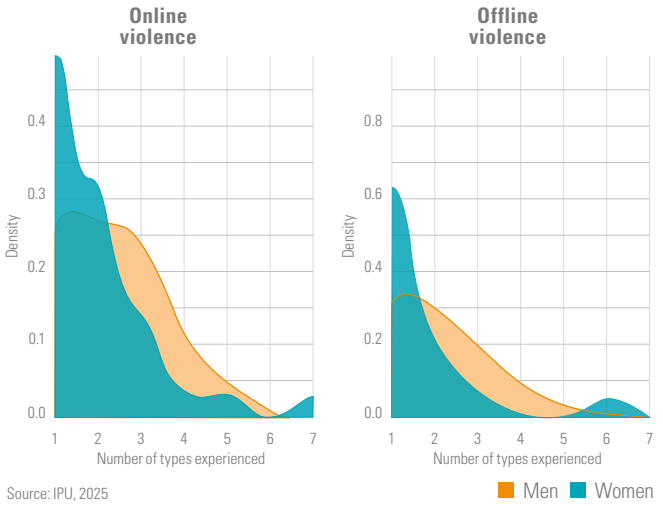
Source: IPU, 2025

Figure 98. Types of offline violence, by gender of the MP



Source: IPU, 2025

Figure 99. Coexistence of different types of violence, by gender



Source: IPU, 2025

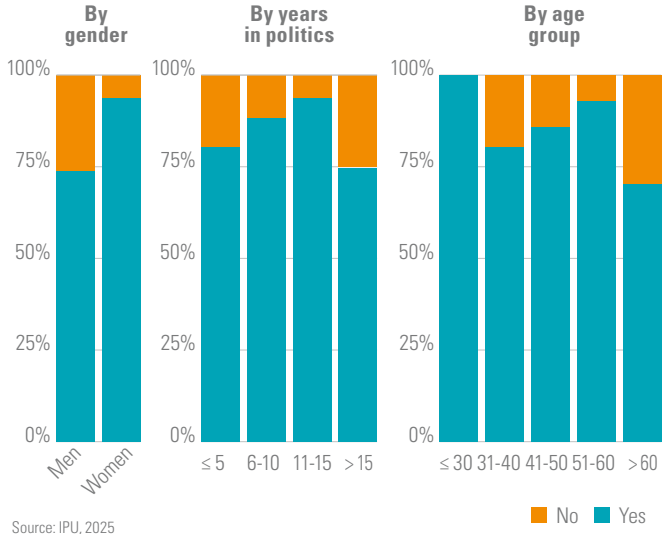
The density maps illustrate how many forms of online and offline violence male and female respondents experienced simultaneously. For online violence, women were more likely to report only one or two forms, reflected in the sharp early peak of the blue curve. By contrast, the flatter, longer curve for men shows that male MPs more often faced multiple types of online abuse at once, which is consistent with earlier findings of broader digital harassment such as insults, fake news and hacking.

Patterns diverge somewhat in the case of offline violence. Women showed a steep peak at one form of violence but also a secondary rise around five to six types, suggesting that a small but significant group faced particularly intense targeting in hostile environments. Men's experiences were more evenly distributed across one to four types, with no comparable secondary peak.

Overall, the data suggest that while women may encounter fewer forms of violence overall, some endure particularly severe offline attacks. Men, meanwhile, more often report a wider mix of online aggression. These contrasting patterns highlight the need for gender-responsive strategies that address both the breadth and intensity of violence MPs experience.

- **Perceptions of a rise of violence**

Figure 100. Perceptions of a rise of violence in the past five years



Source: IPU, 2025

Most respondents – across genders – believe violence against politicians is on the rise. Among male MPs, 39 agreed, 14 disagreed and 11 were unsure. The perception was even stronger among women: 44 reported an increase, while only 3 disagreed and 3 were uncertain. This points to a broad consensus, particularly among women, that political violence is escalating. The gender gap is striking: while men's views were more divided, only a very small minority of women denied an increase. This may reflect women MPs' heightened exposure to gendered or identity-based violence, sharpening their awareness of its growth. Overall, the data suggest widespread concern and the need for structural solutions to what many see as a worsening threat.

Perceptions of rising violence also cut across levels of political experience. Among MPs with five years or less in office, 28 believed violence has increased. Yet this group also had the highest share of respondents who were unsure (11) or who disagreed (7), suggesting a mix of fresh perspectives and lower baseline expectations.

Among MPs with between 6 and 10 years of experience, the perception was nearly unanimous: 23 reported an increase, with only 3 disagreeing and 1 unsure. This supports earlier research indicating that mid-career legislators – by virtue of their greater visibility and activity – are more likely to encounter and perceive violence.

MPs with between 11 and 15 years of experience showed near-unanimous agreement: 14 reported an increase in violence and only 1 disagreed. Among those with more than 15 years in politics, 18 said violence had grown, while 6 disagreed and 3 were unsure. Although still a majority, this group was more divided – likely reflecting longer-term comparisons and shifting reference points drawn from decades of political experience.

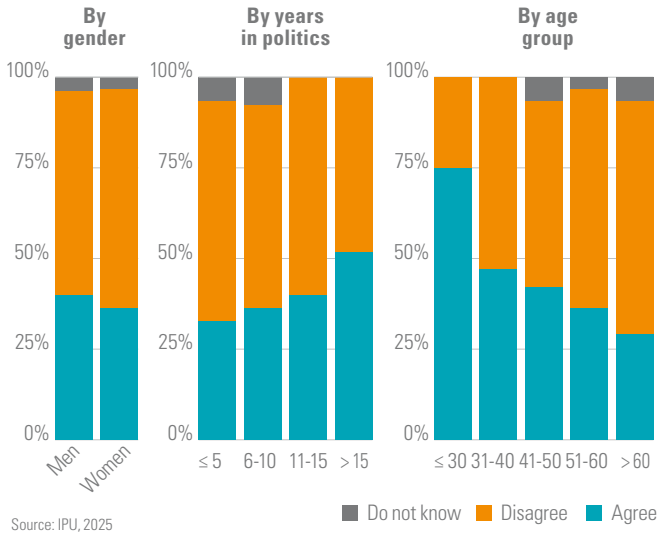
Taken together, the findings show a broad consensus across generations and levels of experience that political violence is rising, with mid-career MPs expressing the most concern.

Perceptions also differ by age. Among the youngest respondents (under age 30), all four respondents agreed violence is on the rise. In the 31–40 age group, 12 out of 17 shared this view, while 3 disagreed and 2 were unsure. Among those aged 41–50 years and 51–60 years – the two largest groups – agreement was overwhelming: 24 and 25 MPs, respectively, said violence had increased, with only small minorities dissenting or undecided. The sharpest divergence appeared among respondents over age 60. While the majority (19) still believed violence had grown, 8 disagreed and 4 were unsure, making this the most divided cohort. This variation may reflect generational differences in expectations, tolerance or baseline comparisons shaped by longer careers.

Despite these nuances, the overall picture is consistent: MPs across all ages perceive a worsening climate for political activity, with middle-aged legislators registering the most uniform and urgent concern.

- **Perceptions of violence "as the cost of doing politics"**

Figure 101. Violence is a cost of doing politics



Source: IPU, 2025

Male and female respondents differ in how they perceive violence as part of political life. While most reject the idea that violence is an inevitable "cost of doing politics", significant gender differences emerge in their assessments.

Among male MPs, a majority disagree that violence is a normal aspect of political engagement, with 26 agreeing and 35 disagreeing, while 3 remain undecided. Female MPs show slightly stronger resistance to this normalization: 30 reject the notion, 18 agree and 2 are undecided. This greater reluctance among women may be influenced by the gendered nature of the violence they face, as well as their possible connections to feminist or rights-based political perspectives.

The normalization of violence across genders reveals systemic issues within political institutions. Yet, the relatively higher rejection among women may indicate a deeper awareness of the risks and consequences of tolerating violence, at both the individual and institutional levels.

Views on whether violence is simply a cost of doing politics vary sharply by MPs' length of political experience. Among those with five years or less in office, a clear majority (28) reject the notion that violence is an inherent part of political life, compared with 15 who agree and 3 who are unsure. This points to a marked resistance to normalizing violence among newer MPs, who may enter politics with higher expectations for institutional safety and accountability.

In contrast, more experienced MPs' attitudes change gradually. In the 6–10 years group, disagreement still dominates agreement (15 versus 10), although the margin is closing. Among MPs with 11–15 years of experience, the percentages are even closer (nine disapprove, six agree), indicating a gradual erosion of the initial rejection of violence as normal.

Among MPs with more than 15 years of experience, agreement and disagreement are nearly balanced (14 and 13, respectively). This pattern suggests that seasoned MPs may be more accustomed to the presence of violence in political life or view it as an unavoidable element of the job. The absence of "don't know" responses in this group may also reflect more firmly established, experience-based attitudes towards the issue.

Together, these data point to a concerning trend: the longer MPs serve in politics, the more likely they are to tolerate violence as a part of their profession. This normalization poses a significant barrier to institutional change initiatives, emphasizing the importance of disrupting acceptance cycles and strengthening safeguards before resignation occurs.

Although the sample is too small to draw definitive conclusions, some patterns emerge. Among MPs aged 30 and under, agreement with the idea that violence is a normal part of politics outweighs disagreement (3 versus 1). In the 31–40 age group, the split is nearly even (8 versus 9). Agreement remains relatively stable across the 41–50 and 51–60 brackets, but disagreement becomes more frequent – especially among MPs over 60, where 20 disagree with the notion compared to 9 who agree. "Don't know" responses are rare in all age groups, suggesting that most MPs hold clear, experience-based views on the issue.

Overall, the evidence shows that age, like experience, is associated with a greater acceptance of violence as intrinsic in political life. This emphasizes the importance of deliberate denormalization measures, particularly those aiming to transform institutional cultures that have long accepted violence as unavoidable.

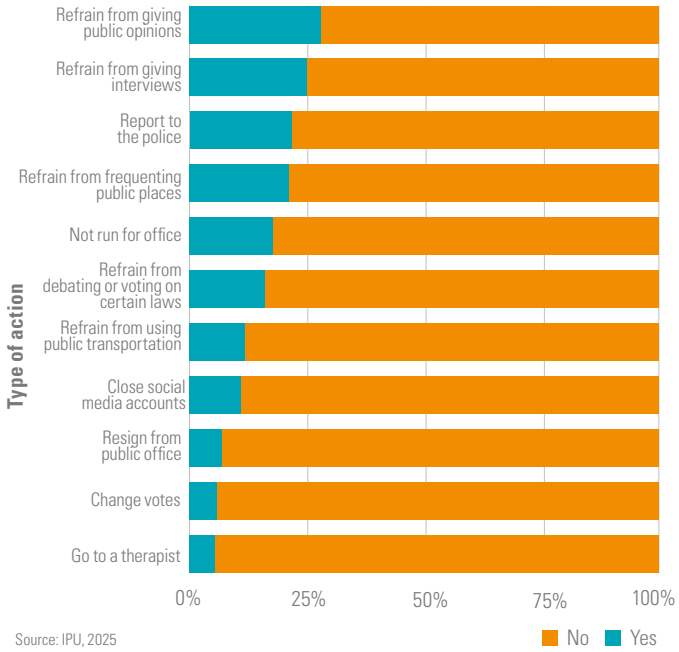
- **Impact of violence on respondents' behaviour**

Violence shapes MPs' behaviour and democratic engagement. While only a few have taken drastic measures, many have considered scaling back their public and political activity.

The most common self-restrictions are avoiding public statements (33) or interviews (29). A notable share also reported considering avoiding public spaces or filing police reports (24). Others have thought about stepping back from debating or voting on certain laws (19) or even not running for office (20) – showing how violence directly threatens democratic discourse and political careers.

Less frequent but still significant responses include avoiding public transport (14), closing social media accounts (13), resigning from office (8), changing a vote out of fear (7) or seeking therapy (6).

Figure 102. Have you considered these actions?



Source: IPU, 2025

Beyond physical and verbal attacks, the most insidious effect of violence may be the growing silence and withdrawal of elected officials from debate and decision-making. When self-censorship and disengagement take hold – especially among women, minorities and younger MPs – they risk eroding the vitality and long-term health of representative democracy.

- **Findings**

This survey offers a valuable but necessarily partial view of the forms, patterns and impacts of political violence experienced by current and former MPs. The results should be treated with methodological care. Despite selecting the sample randomly from approximately 13,000 contacts, the final response rate of 115 participants limits the generalizability of the results. Furthermore, self-selection bias influences the data, with those who replied more likely to have strong opinions around, or direct encounters with, violence. Geographical, institutional and political variety is present but unevenly distributed. As a result, this research should be interpreted as an exploratory investigation identifying salient themes, rather than a definitive or internationally representative portrayal.

Despite these restrictions, the information indicates troubling trends. The majority of respondents (76 out of 115) say they have faced some type of violence during their political careers. These instances occurred in both online and offline venues. The most often reported types online are insults (55), disinformation or fake news (41), and threats (19). Offline violence is most commonly shown as verbal hostility (31) and threats (26), but it can also include property destruction, physical assault and sexual aggression in rare numbers.

Upon examining the individuals most exposed, a distinct pattern becomes evident. Women MPs and those from HDGs report much greater rates of violence. While both men and women face violence, women are more commonly targeted for sexual harassment, the publication of sexual photographs, and sexual aggression, while their male colleagues are more exposed to reputational attacks and digital threats. MPs from minority backgrounds report suffering violence at significantly greater rates than their non-minority counterparts (44 versus 32), highlighting the intersectional nature of political violence.

The accumulation and coexistence of many types of violence is gendered. Men are more likely to report experiencing a broader range of online violence types concurrently, whereas a small but significant group of women report high-density offline aggression, implying that while men may face broader-spectrum attacks, women are more likely to be intensely targeted in specific, often identity-based ways.

Experience and age influence both exposure and interpretation. MPs with lengthier political careers are more likely to report experiencing violence. Importantly, this is a function not only of time but also of a cultural dynamic: individuals who have been in politics for more than 15 years are more inclined to accept violence as "part of the job", whereas fresher MPs prefer to oppose this normalization. When broken down by age, the same tendency emerges: older MPs are more inclined to naturalize violence, although they report it significantly less frequently. This reflects a hazardous process of institutional desensitization, in which extended exposure causes risk internalization and the eroding of limits around acceptable political behaviour.

Perceptions are practically unanimous: the great majority of respondents, regardless of gender, age or political experience, feel that violence against MPs has grown recently. This is particularly true for women and mid-career MPs (6–10 years of experience), who indicate significant levels of exposure as well as a strong conviction that the political atmosphere is deteriorating. MPs from HDGs strongly agree with this assessment, demonstrating that violence is not only on the rise but also disproportionately hurting previously marginalized groups.

Perhaps most concerning is the analysis of the impact of violence on political involvement. A sizeable proportion of respondents claim to have contemplated self-censorship, including abstaining from offering public comments or interviews, withdrawing from discussions, avoiding public venues or transport, and even quitting or declining to run again. These chilling consequences are not hypothetical; they represent a demonstrable reduction in the freedom, safety and inclusion of political life. If not addressed, they threaten to distort democratic processes by suppressing dissident, minority or vulnerable voices.

In conclusion, our exploratory study demonstrates that violence against MPs is a systematic issue with serious institutional and democratic implications. While not representative, the findings provide clear indications of how violence is seen, normalized and resisted. These findings should guide future research, institutional reform, and the creation of intersectional, gender-responsive and preventive tactics for combating political violence, not merely to protect people, but also to safeguard the integrity of democratic institutions themselves.

VII. Institutional survey

As part of this research, we developed and distributed an institutional survey to parliaments to gather information on how they address violence and intimidation by the public against MPs.

The questionnaire contained 22 mainly closed-ended questions covering the following:

- The presence and scope of parliamentary security protocols
- Procedures for reporting, monitoring and investigating incidents
- Prevention and support mechanisms for MPs
- The legal consequences of public violence against MPs

An open-ended question invited respondents to elaborate on their answers or share additional information not captured by the listed options.

In total, 22 legislative bodies from 20 countries across Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America took part. While the responses provide valuable insights, they must be interpreted with caution given the methodological limitations of the study.

1. Constraints of the survey and justification for a qualitative methodology

The survey captures institutional perspectives and formal regulations, which may not fully reflect the lived experiences of MPs exposed to violence or harassment. Its largely closed-question format – despite some space for free-text responses – limits the ability to capture informal practices, contextual nuances and implementation gaps.

Participation was voluntary and uneven across regions and parliamentary systems, with responses more likely from well-resourced institutions. Differences in definitions, perceived risks and institutional capacity also restrict cross-national comparability. For this reason, the analysis takes a qualitative, descriptive approach, highlighting practices, gaps and trends in parliamentary responses rather than offering statistical inferences or rankings.

The study's primary aim is to identify recurring behaviours, institutional shortcomings and emerging patterns that can inform concrete, evidence-based recommendations.

2. Context

Institutional policies to address violence against parliamentarians vary significantly across national contexts, shaped by organizational culture, historical legacies, legal frameworks and perceptions of the most pressing risks (Every-Palmer *et al.*, 2024).

In the United Kingdom, parliamentary responses have focused more on workplace culture and internal protections than on external threats. Following the Cox and White reports, the UK Parliament introduced the Valuing Everyone programme and mandatory behavioural training to tackle bullying, harassment, discrimination and misconduct among MPs and staff. The Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme has since become a central reporting mechanism, logging hundreds of complaints between 2023 and 2024, most related to bullying and harassment, with some linked to online abuse. Although these reforms do not directly address MPs' personal security, recent initiatives have expanded cybersecurity and online safety training, acknowledging the growing significance of digital threats.

Other legislatures place stronger emphasis on external protection and preventive support. The Federal Assembly of Switzerland functions as an information hub, publishing guides for members on how to respond to threats, harassment and insults, and on the safe use of social media. In Ireland, where three quarters of surveyed parliamentarians reported abuse, over 75% of respondents were aware of the Oireachtas Personal Security Allowance and the Workplace Support Programme, and more than half had installed home security systems. Reporting incidents to the police was the most common response (90% of MPs), though satisfaction with outcomes was mixed, and nearly two thirds judged some experiences "not serious enough" to report (Siapera *et al.*, 2024).

Inter-agency cooperation has also emerged as a model. In New Zealand, concerns over individuals fixated on political figures led to the creation of coordinated response teams – police, paramedics and mental health professionals – within the FTAC (Every-Palmer *et al.*, 2024). Inspired by UK research on "fixated threat" assessment (Barry-Walsh *et al.*, 2020), this approach enables early interventions, often involving mental health support.

Heightened risk perceptions are reflected in budgetary commitments. In the United Kingdom, the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority raised its budget for MPs' security expenses from just over £77,000 in 2015 to more than £4.3 million in 2022 (IPSA, 2023). Similarly, in New Zealand, the 2023 budget earmarked dedicated funding for enhancing the security of MPs and their staff (Every-Palmer *et al.*, 2024). Such allocations underscore how security has become a routine and institutionally sanctioned part of parliamentary work.

The issue has also gained traction internationally. The Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly launched the #NotInMyParliament campaign in 2018 to combat violence against women in politics and revisited the issue at its 2025 European Conference of Presidents of Parliament. Likewise, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association's 2024 Westminster seminar emphasized the global nature of abuse and intimidation against politicians, stressing the need to adapt security frameworks for more inclusive legislatures.

Taken together, these cases reflect a fragmented but evolving landscape of institutional responses. Some parliaments emphasize internal behavioural reforms, others prioritize external security, but across contexts there is growing investment in prevention, inter-agency coordination, financial resources and international cooperation. The convergence of these approaches suggests a shared recognition that political violence demands multidimensional solutions – combining cultural change within parliaments with concrete measures to protect representatives from external threats.

3. Analysis of survey responses

a. Security policies and stakeholders

Of the 22 legislative bodies surveyed, half (11) reported having a formal security policy to protect MPs in their workplace, with financial and human resources allocated for implementation. Yet follow-up mechanisms are less consistent: only 27.2% (6) said they review implementation regularly, and just 18.1% (4) – the parliaments of New Zealand, Romania, the United Kingdom and the United Republic of Tanzania – confirmed providing regular security training for MPs.

Most respondents (68.1%, or 15) indicated that their parliament interacts with external security organizations such as the police, but only 27.2% (6) share their security policies with other public-facing bodies, including peer parliaments. A large majority highlighted the involvement of national law enforcement agencies (86.3%, or 19) and local or regional police forces (72.7%, or 16) in responding to incidents of violence against MPs. In addition, 77.2% (17) reported the existence of a dedicated law enforcement or protection unit within parliament, whereas only 18.8% (4) have a dedicated parliamentary committee.

Feedback and visibility mechanisms are even scarcer. Only three parliaments reported seeking input from MPs on the effectiveness of security policies and providing national visibility to the challenges posed by violence and intimidation. Eleven noted that both police and parliamentary security services play a role in protecting MPs, six involved other external law enforcement agencies, and three reported hiring private security contractors.

b. Violence against MPs

Half of the surveyed parliaments (11) reported keeping records of incidents of physical or offline violence against MPs. By contrast, only six track online violence, and just one relies on surveys of parliamentarians to monitor such incidents.

When asked whether incidents of violence towards MPs had been recorded in the past 12 months, 59% (13) answered "no", 22.7% (5) said "yes", and 18.1% (4) were unsure. Notably, only one parliament – that of the United Kingdom – reported giving national visibility to the violence and intimidation experienced by its members.

Although 50% of respondents (11) stated that they have security protocols, only three – the parliaments of New Zealand, Paraguay and the United Kingdom – said they had introduced new procedures or strengthened precautions in response to online and/or offline violence. Moreover, fewer than half (42.9%, or 9 out of 21) provide counselling, medical assistance or legal support to MPs affected by violence.[12]

c. Security measures and MPs' protection

A large majority of parliaments (78%, or 14 out of 18) reported that MPs routinely receive constituents or other visitors in their parliamentary offices. Security measures are widespread: all respondents conduct visitor checks at entry points, 94.1% use real-time monitoring via security cameras inside and outside parliament, 76.4% employ electronic scanning of belongings, 35.2% place security personnel in MPs' offices and 17.6% install cameras within the offices themselves.

Sixty-two per cent of responding parliaments (13 out of 21) stated that MPs typically maintain constituency offices outside parliament. Among these, 46.1% (6) screen visitors and belongings; 38.4% (5) have evacuation routes and on-site security personnel; 30.7% (4) rely on police-linked emergency alarms; 23.8% (4) report locked outer doors, visits from a security adviser, and trained first aiders; 15.3% (2) use trained fire evacuation assistants; and 7.6% (1) have reinforced glass.

The remaining 47.6% (10) offered varied responses. Some emphasized that security depends on MPs' personal arrangements, while others said measures are reserved for parliamentary leaders such as Speakers. Several respondents also highlighted that MPs lack any formal protection outside parliamentary premises.

12 It is worth noting that, in its response, the Federal Assembly of Switzerland indicated that it does not have a direct support service, but that, in cases involving sexual harassment or cyberbullying, it works with a specialist organization to which parliamentarians can be referred in order to receive appropriate support.

d. Legal rights in cases of violence

The shortcomings observed in physical protections are echoed in the legal and procedural realm. Just 28.5% of parliaments (6 out of 21) reported informing MPs of their legal rights and remedies in cases of violence. By contrast, 23.8% (5) admitted they do not provide such information, and nearly half (47.6%, or 10) said they did not know. Only 19.6% (4) indicated that violence against politicians carries more severe penalties than other offences, while 42.8% (9) said it does not and 38.1% (8) were unsure. Similarly, two thirds (66.6%, or 14) affirmed that no lower evidentiary threshold applies to prosecuting these cases, with the rest uncertain.

This high degree of ambiguity underscores both a lack of communication and weak institutional awareness about MPs' legal protections. It also points to the probable absence of codified procedures within many legislatures. Without clear, accessible information – both internally for MPs and externally for the public – it becomes difficult to assess how, or whether, legal safeguards are integrated into broader institutional strategies to prevent and address violence against parliamentarians.

VIII. Conclusions

Political violence against parliamentarians by the public is a global phenomenon that cuts across regions, cultures and political systems. As shown below, its forms and triggers vary from country to country, but the overall trend is clear: no parliament is immune. This makes political violence not only a domestic issue but also an international challenge, which makes a collective sharing of experiences to safeguard democratic institutions and the representatives who sustain them crucial.

1. **Parliamentarians widely perceive that violence by the public has grown in the past five years, though the intensity of this perception varies by country and gender.** From among the five national case studies, the sense of increase is strongest in Argentina and the Netherlands, where about 8 in 10 MPs report it. In Malaysia, nearly two thirds of parliamentarians indicate such a trend, while in Italy the perception is weaker – especially among men – and in Benin it is moderate, with clear gender differences. Overall, concern about escalating hostility is broad, but its distribution varies, pointing to the need for context-specific analysis. The global survey confirmed this trend: 64% of male MPs and 86% of female MPs reported an increase in violence.

   This rise likely stems from multiple factors. Research shows that violence often intensifies at key moments in parliamentary life. Findings here point to parliamentary debates on sensitive issues as one trigger, while both this analysis and past studies show that violence also spikes ahead of elections. Evidence highlights the prevalence of online violence, consistent with studies on the growing role of social media in politics, which amplify exposure to violent encounters – particularly for MPs in high-profile or contentious roles. Other contributing dynamics include divisive political discourse, which lowers thresholds of acceptable behaviour; declining trust in institutions; and heightened scrutiny of politicians during crises such as pandemics or economic downturns. These dynamics encompass online hate speech, disinformation and attacks targeting MPs based on gender, sexual orientation or ideology.

2. **Data consistently show that political violence against MPs is heavily concentrated online, with between 65% and 77% of respondents across case studies reporting such experiences.** The global survey supports this, with 58% of MPs reporting online abuse. This trend signals a shift in where political violence occurs: social media and digital spaces have become central arenas for harassment and intimidation. Yet these platforms remain essential for MPs to communicate directly with citizens. Despite the high prevalence of abuse, few parliamentarians reported closing their social media accounts, suggesting that while online aggression carries personal and political costs, most still view these platforms as indispensable for visibility and engagement.

   Across the five national case studies, insults and threats are the most common forms of online abuse, followed by fake news. Severe aggressions – such as sexual harassment, dissemination of sexual images, hacking, or leaking personal information – are rarer but still significant. For instance, in Argentina, 72% of MPs reported insults, 38% reported fake news, and between 1% and 13% reported more severe aggressions such as sexual harassment or dissemination of sexual images. In Malaysia, 64% of parliamentarians reported insults and 57% fake news, while smaller shares reported severe forms including dissemination of sexual images (8%) and sexual harassment (7%). Similar patterns appear in Italy (74% insults, 21% fake news, ≤8% severe forms), the Netherlands (61% insults, 24% fake news, ≤11% severe forms) and Benin (91% insults, 46% fake news, ≤26% severe forms). This suggests that most online violence is verbal or reputational, yet MPs remain exposed to intrusive and harmful attacks.

   These findings underscore that social media platforms are double-edged: they are vital channels of democratic engagement but also avenues of harassment. Understanding both the prevalence and the forms of online violence is essential to designing prevention and protection strategies that safeguard MPs without undermining their communication with citizens. Online violence also has a clear international dimension, since social media platforms may be headquartered in one country while incidents of intimidation are experienced elsewhere. These platforms also make cross-border intimidation easier, including through automated and orchestrated campaigns, though the extent to which this affects parliamentarians remains uncertain.

3. **Offline violence shows clear variation across cases.** In Benin, nearly half of MPs report offline aggression, mainly in the form of verbal attacks and threats. In Argentina and Malaysia, around one third of parliamentarians indicate such incidents (predominantly verbal) – 31% in Argentina and 36% in Malaysia – with threats and written aggression occurring less frequently, and physical aggression or property damage being rare. In Italy, just under 20% of MPs report offline violence, again mostly verbal. The Netherlands shows the lowest rate, at about 17%, with verbal and written aggression being the most common forms.

   These patterns show that offline aggression – ranging from verbal attacks to threats or property damage – varies widely by context, with Benin reporting the highest levels. Both the frequency and type of incidents differ across countries. This aligns with the global survey, in which 41% of respondents reported experiencing offline violence.

4. **Gendered patterns emerge in both the type and overlap of violence.** Online, insults, fake news and threats dominate for both men and women, though intensity and distribution vary by country. In Argentina, Italy and Malaysia, women tend to be more affected, particularly by insults, fake news, and sexualized forms such as harassment and dissemination of sexual images. In Malaysia, for instance, 75% of women report insults and fake news compared to 62% and 52% of men. In the Netherlands, gender differences are smaller, with women reporting slightly higher exposure to insults and sexual harassment, while in Benin, men report higher exposure to fake news, hacking and threats, and women show moderately higher rates for insults and sexualized forms.

   Offline, verbal aggression and threats remain the most common forms overall, with men more exposed to verbal aggression and threats, and women slightly more likely to experience written, physical or property-related incidents. Across countries, women are also more likely to experience overlapping online violence, whereas men tend to face multiple offline modalities.

   These findings suggest that political violence affects MPs of all genders, but with different modalities and severities. Women are more exposed to combined gendered, verbal, sexual and threatening behaviours online, while men face a broader diversity of offline aggressions.

   Our recent global survey supports these patterns, confirming that women are more affected by insults (94% versus 89%) and sexualized online aggression, and men by diverse offline forms (22% versus 15%). However, it also shows some variation, with men reporting somewhat higher levels of threats – both online and offline – than suggested by country-level data.

5. **MPs with compounded vulnerabilities – stemming from both gender-based risk and belonging to minority or disadvantaged groups – report higher exposure to online violence.** Women MPs who identified themselves as part of a historically disadvantaged group because of their gender reported higher levels of harassment than the average for all women MPs. Likewise, MPs of both genders from ethnic, religious, sexual orientation, socioeconomic or disability-related minorities experience significantly higher levels of aggression across countries**.**

   While offline violence shows no consistent variation by minority or disadvantaged status across countries, in Malaysia there is a moderate difference, with 47% of MPs who identify as part of a vulnerable group reporting incidents compared to 27% of those who do not. This suggests that offline disparities may exist in some contexts, but they are less pronounced than online inequalities. These findings underline the need for targeted measures to protect MPs with compounded vulnerabilities and to ensure their safe participation in political life, both online and offline.

   The global survey confirms that MPs from minority or disadvantaged groups – especially those belonging to multiple vulnerable categories – face substantially higher levels of online violence. Offline aggression, however, shows no consistent patterns by gender or minority status.

6. **Across the case studies, only a minority of MPs viewed violence as a normal or inevitable part of politics, though perceptions varied by country, gender, age and years in office.** In Italy and the Netherlands, few MPs saw violence as inherent to politics, with slightly higher acceptance among men and older or more experienced parliamentarians. In Argentina and Benin, larger shares – particularly among men and long-serving MPs – agreed that violence can be considered part of political life. Notably, in Malaysia, a majority of MPs, both men (62%) and women (56%), perceived violence as an expected feature of political work, with acceptance particularly high among those aged 41–60 years and with 6–15 years in office.

   While most MPs reject the normalization of violence, men, older MPs and those with longer careers are somewhat more likely to view hostility as an expected, if regrettable, aspect of their work. This pattern is common across many countries, though in some contexts, MPs perceive violence as a more routine or inevitable feature of political life, reflecting variation in experiences and political environments.

   This aligns with research on violence against women in politics, which emphasizes that violence targeting women is seen less as an inherent feature of politics than as a barrier to participation (Krook & Restrepo Sanin, 2019). These findings stress the need to address not only violent incidents but also cultural and institutional attitudes that downplay or normalize harassment.

7. **MPs across the case studies identified certain issues as especially likely to trigger violence.** Debates in parliament around identity, rights and democratic principles – such as immigration, human rights, women's rights and, in some contexts, environmental protection – were seen as particularly conducive to violent reactions from the public. These topics often act as identity markers in polarized environments, touching deeply held values and challenging social hierarchies.

   The perceived role of these issues in driving violence varies by region. In Europe (Italy and the Netherlands), immigration and human rights dominate perceptions of risk. In Latin America (Argentina) and West Africa (Benin), corruption, authoritarianism and human rights are more salient. In Asia (Malaysia), human rights, corruption and economic equality are seen as particularly likely to trigger violence. Women's rights and environmental issues are mentioned across contexts, though with differing weight.

MPs' views may reflect not only personal experience but also the symbolic weight of these topics in public debate. Media coverage and political framing can amplify perceptions of risk, making issues like immigration or climate policy appear especially prone to trigger violence, even when incident data is limited. Overall, these patterns suggest that political violence is closely tied to debates that challenge social norms, identity hierarchies or progressive agendas, rather than to routine policy disputes. This underlines the need for targeted protection measures for MPs engaged in such debates.

8. **Across the case studies, MPs reported that most online and offline violence is driven by individual actors rather than organized groups such as media outlets, companies or civil society organizations.** Online harassment is largely attributed to anonymous or identifiable users, whereas offline violence tends to involve citizens or political organizations. In Italy and the Netherlands, anonymous users dominate online aggression, while offline incidents are mostly linked to citizens or political groups. In Argentina and Malaysia, MPs report exposure to violence from a range of perpetrators, with particularly high exposure across multiple categories in Malaysia. In Benin, online aggression is largely attributed to identifiable users, while offline violence shows a more mixed pattern.

   These findings suggest that MPs see online harassment as largely individual-driven and harder to trace, while offline violence is more often tied to identifiable and predictable perpetrators. This highlights both the accountability challenges of digital spaces and the risk that online aggression may spill into physical harm.

9. **Across the case studies, most MPs reported limited behavioural adjustments in response to violence, generally in the form of targeted measures such as avoiding public statements or interviews rather than broad withdrawals from political life.** In Italy and the Netherlands, MPs occasionally closed social media accounts, but resignations or decisions not to run for office were extremely rare. In Argentina, a slightly higher share of MPs refrained from giving public opinions or interviews, reflecting cautious self-restraint in the public sphere. Benin stands out for the number of MPs who limited general public exposure, such as avoiding public places, while formal political actions – debating, voting or running for office – were seldom affected. In Malaysia, MPs showed relatively higher rates of refraining from giving interviews, making public statements and participating in parliamentary votes, highlighting a modest but more pronounced tendency to adjust visible political participation compared with those in other countries, although extreme measures such as resigning or closing social media accounts remained uncommon.

   In addition, MPs reported that violence sometimes affected their family members. This was particularly pronounced in Malaysia (33%), followed by Argentina (31%), Italy (16%), Benin (15%) and the Netherlands (8%), suggesting that exposure to violence can extend beyond MPs themselves and influence their broader social environment.

   These patterns suggest that responses differ depending on whether violence occurs online or offline, and on the severity of the incident. Overall, MPs make measured adjustments – avoiding interviews or public statements rather than resigning or changing votes. Factors such as party backing, peer support and public legitimacy may help buffer against more drastic responses.

   The global survey reinforces these findings: the most common responses were limiting public statements or interviews, while more drastic measures – such as resigning, changing votes or closing social media accounts – remained rare.

10. **Mental health data from the national surveys of MPs point to associated increased rates of reporting of negative effects on well-being where there is exposure to online and/or offline violence.** For individual MPs, these take the form of experiences of stress, anxiety and loss of sleep, which for small proportions of those surveyed are also linked to anticipated or actual withdrawal from political and everyday behaviours. These include turning down opportunities to speak publicly or give interviews or, more rarely, intending to stand down or refraining from voting. Lowering their public profile was not uncommon among MPs whose mental well-being was also suffering, whether through avoiding public places or transport or closing social media accounts. Threats of violence against family and friends were also linked to poorer experiences of mental well-being.

11. **The institutional survey shows that while many parliaments have acted to address MPs' security risks, responses remain fragmented and uneven.** Half of the surveyed parliaments have adopted formal security policies, but fewer conduct regular reviews, provide systematic training or adapt procedures to new forms of violence. Physical security inside parliamentary premises is relatively common, but protections outside are far less consistent, carrying implications for the working conditions of politicians and their staff in constituencies.

    Together, these findings point to operational and procedural gaps: some policies exist but are under-implemented, measures remain uneven and legal safeguards are poorly communicated. Beyond these shortcomings, the problem also has a cultural dimension. Addressing it requires not only stronger protocols, clearer legal frameworks and better coordination, but also active efforts by parliaments to foster a culture that rejects the normalization of violence in politics.

Overall, political violence against parliamentarians is not only a threat to personal safety but also a disruption of democratic life. It can hinder legislative processes, erode democratic norms, push politicians to self-censor or withdraw, deepen social tensions, and weaken public trust in institutions. Perceptions and interpretations of this violence vary across contexts, shaped by institutional protections, social divisions, historical experiences and cultural frameworks. Both established and fragile democracies are affected, yet these factors determine how violence is experienced, understood and addressed. Grasping these dynamics is crucial not only to understand how global trends intersect with local realities but also to design strategies for effectively confronting political violence.

Further research

The findings call for further research using mixed methods – combining surveys with in-depth interviews or digital ethnography – to capture not only prevalence but also meaning, impact and coping strategies. The data reveal more than individual vulnerability: they point to structural dynamics that shape how political actors are targeted, silenced or deterred from public life, especially in digital spaces. Future work could therefore focus on three fronts: advancing global monitoring capacity; deepening understanding of how intimidation shapes MPs' behaviour and parliamentary functioning, particularly in terms of self-censorship and disengagement; and exploring political, social and technological drivers – including polarization, distrust and algorithmic amplification – in order to develop preventive strategies that reduce hostility and strengthen democratic resilience.

This study should be regarded as a research foundation on the topic. Due to the intricacy of the situation, the examination and surveillance of violence against parliamentarians must evolve into a continuous and developing area of focus.

This report presents recommendations to aid parliaments in confronting public violence and intimidation directed at MPs. © Freepik

IX. Recommendations for parliaments

This report presents recommendations to aid parliaments in confronting public violence and intimidation directed at MPs, based on a comprehensive analysis that includes an institutional survey, interviews, desk research and selected case studies. These ideas seek to enhance institutional responses, address current protection deficiencies, and provide safer, more resilient democratic environments for legislative activities.

These recommendations are not intended to replace or limit the roles of other institutions, including the judiciary, law enforcement authorities and regulatory bodies, but to clarify the specific responsibilities and capacities of parliaments within a broader institutional response.

Prevention, security and data collection

1. Establish robust physical and digital security protocols to prevent and mitigate both offline and online violence against MPs. These protocols should be systematically communicated to all members and staff and reviewed regularly to adapt to emerging challenges. There should also be inter-chamber cooperation to carry out complementary, coordinated actions that ensure the safety of all representatives.
2. Establish constituency-based safety protocols – to complement those already in existence in many parliaments – incorporating specialist security advice for all elected officials and their staff, i.e. not only for high-ranking officials.
3. Implement regular data collection – through surveys or in-depth interviews – to document incidents of violence. This information should feed into a comprehensive diagnosis, enabling long-term monitoring of trends and links between online and offline violence. Partnerships with academic institutions can strengthen the rigour and depth of this research.
4. Conduct annual cross-comparisons between security protocols and collect data to ensure measures are continuously updated and adapted to MPs' risks. Coordination with security forces can further strengthen these protocols.
5. Provide targeted training for MPs in areas such as cybersecurity and handling hate speech, as well as physical situation awareness training, equipping them with tools for prevention, early detection and response – such as the use of firewalls and intrusion detection systems, among others.

Reporting and protection

6. Create a permanent, clearly defined, independent, neutral and centralized support mechanism within parliament. It should allow MPs to easily report violence, access legal counsel and receive psychological support, including making access to counselling straightforward and stigma-free. Services may be provided internally or through agreements with external professionals to guarantee high-quality assistance. Given the prevalence of online violence, parliaments should consider creating specialized digital safety units (possibly modelled on FTACs in the UK) to assist MPs in monitoring online threats, to coordinate with law enforcement when threats escalate into credible risks, and to provide training on digital security and offer psychological support for MPs and staff affected by online intimidation.

7. Introduce long-term support programmes – such as coaching, psychological counselling and mentoring – to prevent self-censorship, premature resignation or other outcomes that may undermine MPs' ability to serve. Research has shown considerable benefits of such initiatives in many types of organizations.

8. Develop a risk assessment system capable of triggering protective measures – such as personal security details, digital surveillance or family protection – in response to severe or sustained threats. The goal is to provide tailored protection that adequately supports MPs under pressure.

Visibility and awareness

9. Promote transparency to build public understanding of MPs' roles and the issues under debate, in an effort to reduce political violence during sensitive periods. Communication strategies could include public awareness campaigns, open talks and guided visits to parliament to foster civic engagement.

10. Launch broad awareness campaigns against both offline and online violence, engaging the general public. Partnerships with civil society groups can help deliver consistent and impactful messages to diverse audiences. The IPU could serve as a consultative and dialogue body for conducting capacity-building training sessions or workshops if required.

11. Document and publicize violence against MPs: denounce attacks, correct disinformation and deepfakes, and ensure institutional continuity so the issue remains visible over time.

12. Promote cross-party codes of conduct that discourage hate speech and reinforce parliament's symbolic role in upholding respectful political discourse. The role of the Speaker should be crucial in shaping conduct, because violence within parliament itself normalizes violence against its members.

Intersectionality

13. Include regular risk assessments that account for gender, minority status and media exposure, with the goal of designing tailored prevention strategies. These assessments should guide adaptations in security protocols to address forms of violence that disproportionately affect disadvantaged groups.

14. Ensure all measures adopt an intersectional approach, integrating gender perspectives and recognizing the distinct experiences of minority groups.

Accountability

15. Parliaments should take the lead in developing and overseeing legislative, ethical and human-rights-based governance frameworks for digital technologies and artificial intelligence, ensuring democratic accountability, transparency, international coherence and the protection of fundamental freedoms.

16. MPs should work on finding common ground to create local standards for social media platforms, to provide fast-track reporting for MPs and to publish transparent data on online abuse. These steps help curb intimidation while preserving open communication between MPs and citizens.

17. When intimidation becomes criminal, perpetrators must be identified, investigated and prosecuted. Parliaments and governments should also review whether existing legislation provides adequate deterrence, including the possibility of higher penalties for intimidation of MPs given its impact on democratic institutions. Stronger coordination among parliament, law enforcement and courts – including, when necessary, across borders – is essential.

18. Independent oversight should track how platforms and authorities respond to intimidation. Clear monitoring mechanisms will ensure accountability and build trust in institutional responses.

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