**Seeking Help: Exploring the relationship between NGO presence and gender-based violence reporting***Alexis Work
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**Abstract**

*In asking what factors are associated with reporting levels of gender-based violence, I seek to garner a more clear understanding of how societal conditions may impact the decision to report for women in situations of violence. Though women’s rights have been advancing for the past several decades, gender-based violence (GBV) remains as a pervasive threat to the physical security of women across the world. I hypothesize that the number of NGO’s in a given area oriented towards women’s services will be positively associated with reports of gender based violence. This hypothesis is built on a theory of access and awareness. By providing awareness to their communities about GBV as a crime and offering different forms of support to women in situations of violence, NGOs increase the likelihood that women will report GBV. Using data from the case of Argentina, I confirm my broader hypothesis. Following this, I address the limitations of this project and strategies to improve upon it in future iterations.*

**Introduction**

In settings where women’s rights improve towards closer gender parity with men, the public standing of women improves. Democracies that effectively enforce these rights help to ensure that women have the same opportunities as men. However, deep inequality and impunity in private spaces still remains. Per the UN, approximately a third of women around the globe have experienced physical or sexual violence by a male partner or non-partner at some point in their lives[[1]](#footnote-1). Because so many women risk suffering gender-based violence (GBV), it is crucial that democracies provide adequate and effective resources to protect women’s physical integrity rights in situations of violence. Though reporting gender-based violence isn’t always an easy or feasible option, understanding when women make the choice to seek help from the government can begin to provide a clearer picture of what governmental or societal factors improve the likelihood of reporting. In a first step to more broadly understand how governments effectively assist women in situations of violence, it is important to first question the conditions under which women feel comfortable seeking help from officials. I ask: *What factors affect reporting levels of gender-based violence?* In order to continue improving gender equity, the rights of women must be guaranteed in public and in private.  This research draws on literature in political science, public health, and sociology. Literature in comparative politics addresses women’s representation in democracy and governance, and a growing body of IR work has begun to explore the nature of GBV in conflict and post conflict settings. Studies in public health address barriers and stigma associated with reporting GBV in a variety of settings. Finally, the sociology literature touches on the role of advocacy in spreading awareness about societal issues like GBV.
 I construct a theory of reporting likelihood based on awareness about gender-based violence and support to women in situations of violence. Because women-focused NGOs educate about GBV and advocate against it, their presence in a province is likely to raise awareness about GBV as a crime and access to services that help women in situations of violence. Additionally, NGOs may offer valuable support services to women in situations of violence that makes it easier for them to begin the reporting process. In this way, NGOs may increase the rate at which women officially report GBV crimes. Using the case of Argentina, I test and find support for my hypothesis that the presence of NGOs is associated with calls to report GBV. Additionally, I find support that coupled with stronger federal support, higher levels of reporting calls are associated with NGOs in a given province.
 This paper proceeds as follows. First, I review social sciences literature relevant to women’s rights, gender based violence, and reporting GBV crimes. Following this, I outline my theory about support, awareness, and the presence of women’s NGOs. After detailing my methodological strategy, I explore the results from each stage of the OLS model. Finally, I consider the implications of my result, the limitations of my study, and conclude.

**Framing the issue: reporting gender based violence**

**Gender based violence in the context of comparative politics**

In terms of women’s physical security, a growing vein of literature has begun to address GBV in conflict and post-conflict settings. In particular, literature on women’s physical security tends to focus on conflict or post-conflict settings (Lake 2014). While this work is valuable, there is a need to focus also on women’s rights in a democratic setting. Behl (2017) makes this clear by using the case of India, arguing that despite the nation’s reputation for being a well-consolidated democracy, many women still live in fear of gender based violence. Using the case of the Delhi gang rape to characterize the state of female security in India, Behl stresses that “The way we define politics, the way we categorize democracy, and the way we count public space matters because we can define these concepts to either illuminate or overlook gendered space and gendered violence” (2017, 44). By focusing on inequalities in lived experiences in democratic contexts, we can illuminate nuance in democratic consolidation and quality. In uncovering differences between the experiences of different populations, we can better understand the level of democratic consolidation as it applies to the entire population.

Adjacent to this, some human rights literature addresses abuse in democratic contexts. Primarily, the concept of transitional justice captures the phenomenon that emerged following the collapse of authoritarian regimes in the 1970s and 80s in which abusive officials were held criminally accountable by subsequent democratic judiciaries (Sikkink 2011; Arthur 2009). While democracies are tough on past autocratic abuse, questions still exist about democratic human rights respect and transparency (Eck and Fariss 2018). Electoral and judicial institutions have countervailing effects on executive decisions to abuse, by both incentivizing ‘tough on crime’ positions and protecting the rights of marginalized groups, respectively (Conrad, et al. 2018).

Of course, the human rights literature mentioned thus far is focused on abuse perpetrated by the government. GBV, however, is generally perpetrated by private citizens and does not fall into the category of state-sanctioned repression. Despite this distinction, GBV is still important in the context of human rights. To echo Behl (2017), it is critical that we take the experiences of *all* populations into consideration when measuring democratic consolidation and quality (see Paxton 2000). Along these lines, research suggests that states aren’t free of blame when it comes to protecting victims of GBV. It is possible that in countries with a history of state-based violence against citizens, violence and impunity are somewhat normalized. In addition, governments that fail to enforce laws that punish violence against women facilitate continued perpetration of GBV (Menjívar and Drysdale-Walsh 2017). An example of this is the distinction between femicide and feminicide, where in addition to signifying the killing of a woman for reasons of her gender, the latter is regarded as highlighting the state’s role in the act as well. By failing to protect women and punish offenders, states become complicit actors in feminicide.

**Reporting gender-based violence**

The decision to report an incident of gender based violence is complex. Liang et al. (2005) outline a multistep process in the decision to report in which a person experiencing interpersonal violence (IPV). These considerations underline the complexity of an individual decision to report (or not report) GBV. It is useful to review theories on reporting in a fashion similar to Liang et al.’s (2005) theoretical framework. Per this framework, individual considerations are made to define an event as GBV and weigh personal costs and benefits of reporting. Upon making the decision to report, the individual then is tasked with selecting a source of help, whether formal or informal. At each stage of the help-seeking process, interpersonal, individual, and sociocultural factors play into the final decision (2005, 73). Work done in settings around the globe helps to paint a picture of the conditions under which women in different cultural contexts report, and, in some work, the experience that they have as a result.

In the context of my research, I use the term gender-based violence (GBV) to refer to harm directed towards individuals as motivated by his or her biological sex or gender identity[[2]](#footnote-2). Some cited research uses alternative definitions, generally to refer to a more specific type of gendered-violence. When citing other authors, I adopt their terms, but the focus of this paper is GBV specifically.

***Personal and social factors***

Research evaluating personal and cultural barriers to reporting sheds light on the mental and emotional damaged wreaked by GBV. In an evaluation of PTSD associated with sexual assault, Dietz et all find that women who report negative social and self-stigmas are more likely to express symptoms of PTSD (2015). In addition, women who perceived more severe consequences as a result of their attack were also more likely to have PTSD symptoms. Supported by additional empirical research in the U.S. and India (Kennedy and Prock 2018; Chandra et al. 2009), this finding suggests that socialization that normalizes anti-victim stigma around GBV is likely to exacerbate the mental distress felt by victims of sexual assault. High stigma is also associated with nonreporting, assault severity, and revictimization (Kennedy and Prock 2018).

External factors also play a role in the decision-making process. In a survey of perceived barriers to reporting, Sable et al. (2006) find that women see fear of retaliation, dependence on or relationship to the aggressor, and a lack of resources as the largest barriers to reporting sexual assault. Shame, confidentiality concerns, and fear of not being believed were additional barriers reported by both sexes. In a study of female offenders in the U.S., Carbone-Lopez et al. find that the attack severity and reporting are strongly associated[[3]](#footnote-3) (2015). If a weapon is involved, there are multiple perpetrators, or the victim suffers and injury requiring medical attention, women are more likely to report (p.368). The other side of this relationship is a more malevolent one; as women in situations that aren’t typically depicted as “real rape” are less likely to report. Attacks by partners, the influence of alcohol or drugs, or a party context are factors associated with ‘illegitimate’ sexual assault. If an attack happens in the context of crime, whether it be a drug deal gone wrong or involving a large crime syndicate, reporting may carry even more risk (Reuter 2009).

Survey research on the general population reveals similar trends to the studies on women in situations of violence. Work on assault intervention suggests that bystanders are more likely to intervene if the assault is more severe (Bennett et al. 2017). Additionally, individuals are more likely to intervene if they know either the aggressor or victim. Caetano et al.’s study on interpersonal violence (IPV) finds a large gendered distinction between what individuals perceive to ‘count’ as abuse (2009). Among couples surveyed about incidents of IPV in their relationship, there was a 30% and 90% reporting difference for psychological aggression and sexual coercion, respectively, with men underreporting. These results suggest that external social factors accompany one’s internal conflict with reporting GBV.

Institutional factors

In addition to immediate social and emotional influences in reporting, an individual in a situation of violence must also consider the nature of formal institutions that can be reported to. Work on police trust and judicial procedure surrounding GBV suggests that there are many factors that may diminish confidence in the police.

 Macaulay’s review of judicial domestic violence procedure in Latin America highlights competing institutional features; while the region has been swift in criminalizing domestic violence, they have simultaneously shifted legal proceedings in this area towards conciliatory or transactional justice procedures (2006). In this way, governments fail to adequately punish aggressors and protect women from retaliation**.**

 Police trust, at least in the United States, is related to the level of procedural fairness that people perceive in the police. Citizens who express more trust in the police are also more likely to report crimes, follow the rules, and perceive the police as legitimate (Tyler 2011). Parallel studies conducted in Latin America suggest similar trends. Predictably, trust in legal institutions is strongly associated with trust in police (Cao and Zhao 2005). Work on victimization and trust in the region demonstrates that crime victims are likely to lose vertical trust in police and governance institutions, but their horizontal trust in other citizens remains the same (Corbacho et al 2015). Conclusions drawn from research suggest that trust in police may be related in part to individual experiences with authoritarianism; a negative correspondence between age and police trust along with tenuous institutional trust provides evidence for this (Cao and Zhao 2005; Corbacho et al. 2015). An additional concern is the distribution of law enforcement presence throughout society. In areas lacking a consistent and efficacious state presence, individuals may not feel that reporting is effective. Alternatively, they may defer to informal leaders of an area, for example, criminal organizations in the Favelas of Rio de Janeiro (Wolff 2015). Though these studies don’t speak specifically to GBV crimes, they do suggest that police and government trust in Latin America, is in some circumstances, tenuous.

Considering GBV crimes specifically, Hickman and Simpson’s study of domestic violence corroborates Tyler’s thesis on police trust (2003). Women who perceive previous interventions by police to have gone favorably are more likely to report future incidents. As mentioned, Carbone-Lopez et al.’s study of female offender reporting suggests that the more an attack resembles a “real rape”, the more likely respondents were to have reported an incident. Respondents overwhelmingly cited not believing that the police could help them as a primary reason for not reporting (Carbone-Lopez et al. 2015).

Related work focuses on police perceptions of GBV scenarios. Gracia et al. survey the effects of benevolent and hostile sexism in Spanish police (2014). Their survey evidences that officers with higher levels of benevolent sexism were more likely to act conditionally in situations of interpersonal violence, and officers with high levels of hostile sexism displayed tendencies to act conditionally *in favor* of a male perpetrator. Venema et al.’s interview research of police officers in the U.S. provides strong evidence that although they follow protocol, police officers carry preconceptions about rape that are misleading (2016)[[4]](#footnote-4). In some scenarios, police condoned partner violence or suggested that women use their sexuality to solve intrapersonal conflicts (Sagot 2005; Frias and Agoff 2015). Accounts from police in part confirm the concerns had by victims in reporting. Police officers do hold biases that they take with them on the job, and though this may not whether or not they follow procedure, it may affect the nature with which they proceed.

Reporting trends

GBV reporting is generally quite low, but studies do uncover predictors of variation in reporting and variation in the nature of GBV crimes in certain circumstances. Palermo et al. (2013) consider health survey data in several developing countries. On average, only 7% of women who experience GBV formally report it, with regional averages ranging from 2% in Asia to 14% in Latin America. The authors credit higher reporting levels in Latin America to both higher levels of development as well as a history of advocacy for human rights. Geographic research in the global South considers the relationship between urbanization and GBV, finding competing results. McIlwaine (2013) uses survey data and urbanization rates, finding that perpetrators in urban settings are less likely to be known in urban settings and more likely to be known in rural ones. Urban settings may create more risk factors for gender-based violence by yielding poorer areas, social fragmentation, and closer living conditions.

Frias and Agoff make use of survey data and focus groups in Mexico to garner information about how victims of partner violence seek help from family members and formal reporting sources (2015). The focus groups confirmed strong intra-family norms directed against formal reporting. Women in traditional marriages are less likely to seek formal support: more than one focus group members cited family member pressure to stay in a relationship despite abuse. On the other hand, younger women, and unmarried women living with partners were more likely to seek help. Importantly, indigenous women were most likely to go to authorities in lieu of confiding in family members, suggesting strong norms against women’s autonomy in largely indigenous communities.

Sagot’s study of help-seeking by victims of GBV across Latin America employs focus groups, service provider interviews, and victim interviews throughout ten countries in the region (2005). Victim experiences across communities were “tragically similar” (p.1299), as very few women who contacted service providers received adequate support or information. Interviews of the women revealed that many service providers, especially in the law enforcement and judicial sectors, are biased against women. In many communities under study, traditions persisted that undermined female autonomy. For example, about a third of the marriages in Cusco, Peru were arranged and some women in Guatemala were forced to marry their rapists to protect their honor. This study, along with that of Frías and Agoff (2015) suggests that cultural and interpersonal norms serve as significant barriers in the reporting process for many Latin American women in situations of violence.

**Political advocacy, awareness, and action**

An important component of reporting GBV to authorities is the level of individual and cultural awareness about GBV as a crime and women’s rights. In this respect, social movements, nonprofits, and other political advocacy organizations may play an important role in making individuals and communities more aware of what counts as GBV and what to do if an incident occurs. In addition to possible SMO impact on political outcomes, movements oriented towards GBV and women’s issues may be able to increase public awareness about problems associated with domestic violence, intimate partner violence, and gender inequality.

Within the literature on social movements, many authors have sought to understand the conditions in which social movements are ‘successful’; that is, when they are able to set the political agenda, influence policy, or reach a more specific movement goal (Burstein 1999; Amenta, et al. 2010). Of course, movement ‘success’ is hardly a straightforward topic (see Tilly 1999), but this vein of research has suggested several conditions under which social movements are more or less effective in different respects. Empirical studies suggest that when political competition is low, public opinion is favorable, and SMOs have institutional allies, SMO activity is more likely to lead to political change (Soule and Olzak 2004; Giugni 2007).

Oftentimes, the effect that SMOs have on culture are implicit in theories that focus on policy change; movements are often cited for indirect pressure on government decisionmakers through the public. Additionally, when SMOs are responsible for change, it ostensibly affects the public (Earl 2004). Recent research demonstrates that social movements may have a direct impact on public awareness (Banaszak and Ondercin 2016). Still, the relationship between SMO activity and audience effects is not well understood (Earl and Garrett 2017**).** It is important to note that what is known about SMOs is largely drawn from U.S.-based studies, and work in Latin America could supplement this (Amenta, et al. 2010).

Studies of nongovernmental organizations suggest a more direct link between NGO advocacy, government action, and audience effects. When NGOs have the resources to pressure governments and mobilize citizens for a cause, governments are more likely to respond with funding (Murdie & Hicks 2013). More recently, work by Nuñez provides strong evidence that NGOs that provide services in areas are effective in information sharing, and especially, education about political rights and government services that encourages interaction with the government (2019). Given that NGOs don’t provide services that compromise the government’s role, they are associated increased political engagement. If this relationship travels, NGOs that provide information for individuals experiencing GBV can facilitate greater communication about this issue, and ideally, increased levels of government reporting.

Theory

Given what is known about GBV reporting, I design a theory around awareness, support, and the reporting process. Broadly, I argue that the presence of more women’s services NGOs in a given area will be associated with higher reporting levels of gender based violence crimes. Specifically, this relationship is facilitated through two primary mechanisms: awareness and support. First, through public advocacy and outreach, NGOs increase awareness about GBV as problematic and a crime. Additionally, through the provision of support services such as education, counseling, and help to exit vulnerable situations, NGOs provide access to women in situations of violence.

 Before an individual can even consider reporting GBV, they must first understand what constitutes GBV and be able to identify that they have been a victim of this type of crime. Increased awareness about GBV can increase the chances that a woman reports GBV in two ways. First, through outreach work on GBV, NGOs may change the way that individuals view abuse that they experience and help them define it as gender based violence. For example, a woman may not realize that when her spouse controls her earnings that this falls under GBV. In this way, information provided by NGOs can be particularly important for acts that are less overtly violent. Additionally, NGOs provide information about resources available to women in situations of violence. Following Nuñez’s logic, the provision of this information may facilitate contact between people experiencing GBV and relevant government officials. By providing awareness about GBV and options that women experiencing GBV have, NGO can help women problematize abuse they’re experiencing and consider options for seeking help.

 In addition to awareness increasing the likelihood of reporting, I propose a second mechanism: support. Women in situations of violence are more likely to report when the benefits of reporting outweigh the costs (Liang et al. 2005). Support provided by NGOs can be instrumental in rebalancing this cost benefit analysis. By providing childcare, a place to stay, legal assistance, or counseling, an NGO may facilitate the reporting process. With support from NGOs, women in situations of violence may be able to more easily distance themselves from a situation of violence.

 Figure one demonstrates the aforementioned mechanisms as they are proposed to function in my hypothesis. It is likely that in many situations, individuals become aware about GBV and support offered by an NGO before actually receiving that support. However, it is possible that women receive support and become aware simultaneously, or only require awareness and not support. For these reasons, I position each mechanism side-by-side in the relationship between women’s services NGOs and the decision to report GBV.

The association that I propose suggests a simple hypothesis: *The number of NGOs oriented towards women’s services in a given area will be positively associated with reports of gender-based violence*. In order to test this, I focus on the case of Argentina.

*Figure 1*



Case Study: GBV in Argentina

In order to test the hypothesis that NGO’s oriented towards women’s services in a given area are positively associated with calls to report gender based violence, I use data from Argentina. Because gender-based violence and femicide have become salient political issues in the country in the last five years, this is an ideal environment in which to evaluate how multiple factors may have an impact on reports of gender-based violence.

Since 2009, femicide has been classified as a crime in Argentina, but legislation to track and prevent femicide remained mostly ineffective and symbolic in nature[[5]](#footnote-5). After a string of high profile femicides in May of 2015, journalists, NGOs, and concerned citizens staged protests across the country under the hashtag #NiUnaMenos, or not one female less. On June 3rd, 2015, about 200,000 protesters gathered in the Federal Capital’s Plaza de Mayo to call for more to be done to prevent femicide, and sister protests were recorded in 80 cities across Argentina. Following this, the government began to comply with 2009 law, tracking femicides and eventually strengthening its federal agency for women. The level of mobilization around #NiUnaMenos has decreased over time, but activists continue to rally around the hashtag on social media, and the movement gains momentum around important anniversaries, acts of impunity by the government, and high profile gender-based violence crimes.

Methods

In order to test my hypothesis, I rely on data from Argentina’s national statistics database, the National Institute of Statistics and Census (INDEC). Almost all of the variables implemented here have been converted into rate values per 100,000 residents. Given the scope of my data, I focus on a time period beginning in January of 2016 and ending in July 2018.

**Dependent variable**

For my dependent variable, reports of domestic violence, I use a monthly rate of calls to report domestic violence in each of Argentina's 24 provinces. Data on reports of gender-based violence come from INAM. The institute, a sub-agency of Argentina's Ministry of health and social development, started a national-level hot line with information on gender-based violence in mid-2015**.** Called *línea 144* (line 144), anyone can call the hotline to ask questions about GBV, report an incident of GBV, and learn more information about options in the event of GBV. INAM releases monthly reports about calls, with summaries about the nature of incidents reported. I collect information about the rate of calls made by individuals to report a first-time incident of gender-based violence. To account for population, I convert them into a month-province rate using province population estimates from 2015. Because monthly call data is only accessible from 2016 to mid 2018, my study is concentrated on a period of time spanning from January 2016 to July 2018.

**Independent variables**

To operationalize my key independent variable, I use data on the rate of women-oriented NGOs in each province. I make use of INAM's data on centers for assistance (*centros para ayuda*) to women in abusive or violent situations. The rate of women’s services NGOs in a given province should help capture the level of support and awareness for women in situations of violence. Descriptive statistics for all of the variables mentioned are provided below.

 Admittedly, this fixed measure of NGOs is a crude measure at best when it comes to capturing the mechanisms that I propose are at play. High variance among NGO capacity isn’t accounted for here. In light of this, I employ an additional independent variable: the creation of INAM. Prior to September of 2017, Argentina’s National Institute for Women was CNM, or the National Council of Women. In being given ‘institute’ status, INAM acquired budgetary autonomy and increased decision making power in terms of its service provision and policy agenda. There is convincing evidence that the growth of the federal agency had an empowering effect on NGOs across Argentina. In addition to increased political advocacy about GBV on the part of the government, INAM could better financially support NGO efforts across the country. In addition to budgetary control, a budget increase in 2017 may have strengthened monetary windfalls associated with the change.

 In order to capture differences in NGO presence before and after the implementation of INAM, I create a dummy variable coded as 1 for each month observation after September 2017. I interact the INAM dummy with NGOs to test this effect.

**Controls**

In addition to NGOs, I also use information about help centers to control for other types of centers for assistance that may be related to an increase in calls to línea 144. I consider the rate

of health centers, police stations, and legal services specifically[[6]](#footnote-6). In the event that a woman decides to seek assistance, she may instead access one of these services based on the nature of her situation. In this way, other assistance centers may serve as substitutes for NGOs.

Using 2015 census data, I control for the population in each province. Although all applicable measures have been converted into rates, the population variable may help to capture the effect of urbanization on calls, given the high variance in population across Argentina. An additional factor that may affect reporting calls is the level of salience of GBV crimes in a given area. For this reason, I add a control for the monthly rate of femicides in a province to capture any effect that extreme GBV may have on calls. This data is reported by Argentina’s Ministry of Justice and Human Rights, which has been regularly publishing femicide statistics since 2015[[7]](#footnote-7). Finally, economic conditions may increase the rate of GBV as a result of living conditions or criminal tendencies (McIlwaine 2013; Dix-Carneiro et al. 2018). To account for this, annual estimates of provincial exports in millions of dollars are added to the model, as provided by INDEC.

A look at table 1 provides insight into some of the variables of focus. A few trends are worth highlighting. First, though the minimum of GBV reporting calls is zero, there are only two observations in the data in which nobody in a province calls to report GBV. Additionally, the lower number of observations for calls is a result of missing data; INAM’s monthly report for July 2016 is incomplete. Additionally, there *are* three provinces without NGOs that provide services to women. San Juan, Santa Cruz, and San Luis do not have women’s NGOs listed, which likely is in part associated with low populations in these areas. Outside of these provinces, I account for 156 NGOs across the 21 other provinces. Finally, the population in millions of provinces varies greatly, from the roughly 200,000 inhabitants of Tierra del Fuego to nearly 17 million people living in Buenos Aires province.

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| Table 1. Descriptive Statistics |
| Variable | Number of Observations | Mean  | Standard Deviation | Minimum | Maximum |
| Rate of reporting calls | 720 | 4.491 | 3.521 | 0 | 20.954 |
| Rate of Women’s services NGOs | 744 | .396 | .367 | 0 | 1.313 |
| Monthly Rate of Femicides | 744 | .048 | .09 | 0 | .657 |
| Population (millions) | 744 | 1.8 | 3.2 | .2 | 16.7 |

**Models**

To test my hypothesis, I first run an ordinary least squares regression. In addition to this, I run the same model, but with random effects at the provincial level. A partial pooling strategy may be useful given the data for a few reasons. First, provincial level factors such as urbanization, governance, and culture may lead to unaccounted for differences across provinces. The random effects model helps to ensure that the attributes of high population provinces don’t drive coefficients.

Results

Table 2 demonstrates model results for, first, the ordinary least squares model, and second, the random effects model. Across both models, the interacted independent variable is significant, which supports the idea that after the creation of INAM, women’s services NGOs are positively associated with calls to report GBV. For every one women’s services NGO per 100,000 residents in a given area, there are approximately 1.5 more calls to report GBV. The rate of NGOs alone is significant in the first model, with a coefficient estimating that prior to INAM, one NGO per 100,000 residents is associated with approximately 1.6 monthly calls to report GBV. Given the first model, these results estimate that the creation of INAM essentially doubled the rate of calls to report gender based violence. Across both models, the role of INAM alone is insignificant, suggesting that the federal agency alone did not impact reporting.

 In comparing the two models, there are large differences in both coefficient size and significance. Most importantly, women’s services NGOs lose significance in the random effects model. In addition, other centers for assistance lose significance in the second model as well. Across both models, population and the economic measure retain significance. Importantly, the interacted measure is significant and holds similar value across models, which demonstrates that it is robust to multiple specifications.

 

Table 2: Model Results

To demonstrate the effect of NGOs more clearly, the average marginal effects plot for the relationship between NGOs and calls before and after INAM shows the average effect of additional women’s services NGOs on calls to report GBV. On the left hand side, the coefficient bar demonstrates that prior to INAM, on average, the existence of one additional women’s service NGO per 100,000 people was associated with .6 calls to report GBV. Crossing the zero threshold, this value is not significant. However, on the right hand side, the value presented shows that post INAM, the addition of one women’s services NGO is associated with 2.1 calls to report GBV.

Figure 2: Average Marginal Effects of NGOs on reports, before and after INAM

 These findings strongly support the association between NGOs and GBV reporting in the post-INAM era; however, only the first model confirms the association between women’s services NGOs and reports prior to INAM. Because the second model provides a coefficient that moves in the expected direction, I remain optimistic about my hypothesis. Given these results, I walk away from my analysis with partial support for my hypothesis.

Discussion, limitations, and directions for future research

Based on the model results, there’s evidence that the presence NGOs leads to an increase in calls to report domestic violence. If the theory is correct, improving access to help services and awareness about gender-based violence results in more calls to report it. This finding carries important implications. First, it is crucial that women in situations of violence have the necessary resources to safely exit an abusive relationship or condition. It is clear that work by women’s services NGOs helps to educate women in vulnerable situations about what constitutes GBV and how to proceed. Put simply, knowledge is power. Second, this finding highlights the need of comparative scholars to factor heterogeneity across populations when considering democratic quality. Certain groups in society may be more likely to experience infringements on their physical and political rights regardless of de jure guarantees. Scholars implicitly refer to the average citizen in discussions of rights and regime quality; however, by recognizing disparities across gender, class, and race, important differences can be recognized and accounted for.
 Despite encouraging results, this research is subject to several limitations worth mentioning. To start, more evidence is warranted to corroborate the theoretical argument of this paper. Future qualitative work on women-oriented NGOs in Argentina may help elucidate the mechanisms by which women come to officially report GBV. The rate of NGOs in each province is a relatively blunt instrument that fails to capture NGO effectiveness or ascertain the level of either of the mechanisms proposed in my theory. By assessing these NGOs qualitatively, future iterations of this project will use more nuanced measures of NGO effectiveness in an area. The results in this study confirm my hypothesis in only a correlational capacity. Future research on this topic will aim to establish more direct support for each of the mechanisms that I propose.

 To add to this, like most research, my study is not immune to the threat of endogeneity. It is plausible that the presence of women’s oriented NGOs in an area is an effect of high levels of gender-based violence. Thus far, I have employed two strategies to assess and mitigate this issue. First, I have collected data on the founding dates of 131 of the 159 women’s NGOs in my data. Of the dates I have collected, only five NGOs have been established during the time period under study. This ratio provides support that endogeneity, at least in the data used here, is not an insurmountable threat. Additionally, in future iterations of this work, I plan to implement an instrumental variable to exogenously estimate NGOs in a given area. In the case of Argentina, past levels of state-led violence are strong predictors of the presence of current NGOs. Ideally, an instrumental variable model can isolate the causal relationship that I seek to find.

In addition, due to limited data on GBV, the timespan of this research is relatively limited. Extending the timespan under study may help put the link between NGOs and calls to a more robust and time-specific test. This can help in testing for a potential nonlinear relationship, demonstrating diminishing effects, between NGOs and calls to report. Further, it is important to consider this relationship outside Argentina and across the region. Implementing a cross-country analysis of this phenomenon can further strengthen this finding. Finally, the concept of awareness is an area deserving closer scrutiny. More work should be done to address how awareness works; in absence of an understanding of the heterogeneous effects that different sources may have on awareness about GBV, little can be drawn from the concept. Ideally, future research will better illuminate these concepts.

Conclusion

Sitting at the intersection of governance, public health, and human rights, the aim of this research is to help forge a deeper understanding of women’s physical autonomy and security in democratic regimes. In asking what affects reporting levels of gender-based violence, I find support for the hypothesis that a higher rate of NGOs leads to an increase in official reports of gender-based violence. These findings support the theory that through the provision of services to women in situations of violence and information about gender-based violence, NGOs help to increase the number of women who seek help when facing these situations.
 This result holds important implications for policymakers and scholars alike. First, education about what constitutes gender based violence and services for women in situations of violence leads to more reporting of GBV. In order to improve the physical security of women, governments should consider implementing policies that increase awareness and access. In addition, it is important for political science scholars to consider the heterogeneous nature of respect for physical and political rights in democratic regimes.

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Appendix

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| **Table 3: Categorization scheme for centers for assistance** |
| **Coded category of centers for assistance** | **INAM categorizations** |
| Social services | Social action, older adults, social areas, community, family, ministry of defense, childhood/adolescence |
| Health | Addiction, health,  |
| Women’s services | Women’s areas, female police stations, domestic violence police stations, family violence health services, obstetric violence. |
| Legal | Reference center; human rights; migrations office; national institute against discrimination, xenophobia, and racism (INADI); legal, institutional violence |
| Work violence | Work violence |
| Police station | Police station, missing persons services, policing, security forces |
| NGO | NGO |

1. UN Women [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Adapted from Women for Women International. <https://www.womenforwomen.org> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The authors find that criminal history is not related to notification of a crime, though the population interviewed isn’t ideally representative of the population. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Officers are more likely to legitimate assault when it has been committed by a stranger, a deadly weapon is involved, or a victim presents defensive wounds or injuries. However, realistic statistics suggest that the overwhelming majority of victims are assaulted by people they know, without a weapon, and that sexual assault doesn’t always result in physical damage requiring medical treatment. This evidence comes from Planty et al. (2013): 78% of sexual violence was committed by someone known to the victim, only 11% of reported victimizations involved a gun, and only 35% of victims are treated for injuries. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Per Law 26.485 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See full help center coding scheme in appendix. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Ley 26.485 officially establishes a national registry of femicides, but this data wasn’t tracked in practice until supreme court justice Elena Highton mandated the tracking and publication of femicide statistics. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)