



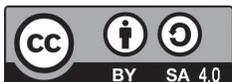
DIGITAL RIGHTS: LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

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The online mobilization against Jair Bolsonaro, Julien Blanc and the rape culture

*Michael Freitas Mohallem*⁷⁹

In March 2014, the world was surprised by the results of the research “Social tolerance to violence against women” by the Institute of Applied Economic Research (IPEA), which indicated that Brazil is a country that tolerates violence against women. More than 65% of men had agreed that “women who wear clothes that show the body deserve to be attacked”. The results provoked strong reaction in social networks and thousands of women left the image of their nakedness convey the message that “they do not deserve to be raped”.

The online campaign, started by journalist Nana Queiroz on her Facebook profile, had 40,000 likes and was followed by a review of the research conducted by IPEA. Although errors were found in the tabulation of the results and a less shocking conclusion was published, the new data that one in every four Brazilians is tolerant to abuse against women has not diminished the feeling that this is still an obscure feature of most men in the country.

What could have been an isolated moment of feminism in the spotlight has remained a living and active feeling in social networks. One of the signatures of the demonstrations is its objectivity: the end of rape culture may depend on cultural change at a deeper level and, therefore, time

⁷⁹ Michael Freitas Mohallem is a professor at Rio de Janeiro Law School and Avaaz’ campaign director in Brazil.

consuming, but what people are looking for through the recent online actions are immediate results, able to signal the change in the tolerance degree with misogynistic, and sometimes criminal, statements.

That's what it was possible to detect last November when a group launched an online petition asking the Brazilian government to deny Julien Blanc his visa request to enter the country. The "Hitch artist" sold lectures on how to become a womanizer, but his videos available on the Internet made people sick to their stomach by the humiliating way the girls were treated. Blanc speaks to the camera, laughs, uses physical force to abuse women, as if they were also spectators of his actions. What they thought about it did not matter much to the guy. They are objects of his "business".

The campaign touched thousands of people, caught the attention of the press and caused the Secretariat of Women Policies (SPM) to position itself publicly on the matter. Rather than simply condemning Blanc's action, the SPM ratified the claim and began to pressure the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) to prevent Blanc from entering Brazil. In only four days, the petition reached 350,000 subscribers who celebrated the confirmation by the MRE (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) that, in Brazil, Blanc would not have a chance to propagate violence against women. As a result of intense online reaction, his visa will be denied.

In the third and most recent episode, Congress member Jair Bolsonaro offended female congress member, Maria do Rosário, again on the House floor. He said: "The only reason why I don't rape you is because you don't deserve it". The words of Bolsonaro, although not new, this time provoked the reactions of women and men who do not tolerate the abortion culture. The repulse at the idea that rape is a possibility that depends only on the offender's will motivated thousands of people to start discussions about the act.

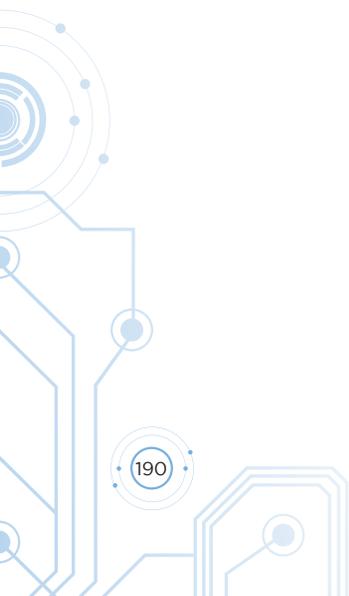
Cristian, a member of the Avaaz community, started an online petition asking the impeachment of Bolsonaro's mandate for breach of parliamentary decorum. In a few days, the campaign won the support of 250,000 people and motivated protests in front of the National Congress. The deputy Federal Attorney General, Ela Wiecko asked the Supreme Court to judge Bolsonaro for inciting rape. Members of various parties have also agreed on Bolsonaro's impeachment and the Ethics Committee of the House may be challenged again in the next legislature. Once again, the strength and intensity of what happens on social networks seems to provide assurance and support for institutions to continue fast in the direction of what before could not be realized.

The various demonstrations against the known hatred and prejudice in the performance of Jair Bolsonaro opened healthy space for reflection on the limits of freedom of expression. And once again we are faced with a known limitation of this right that becomes mixed up with the principles of democracy: hate speech does not receive the full protection that we should provide to all other forms of expression of ideas. This congress member summarizes a paradox of the proportional representative system. While he is the most voted congress member of the State of Rio de Janeiro, he represents an ideology of a minority group in the state and in Brazil.

In Bolsonaro's case, it is important to observe that it has to do with a political strategy of conservative speech radicalization in order to compose the bizarre character he wishes to personify. Public figures who become famous for extravagances or, worse, with attacks to other groups in society, should suffer careful public scrutiny so that people know who is the man or woman behind the character.

The pressure against Bolsonaro has been working. From network to courts, people seem determined to change the way we look at crimes against women once and for all. Avaaz promises to organize a great act of delivery of signatures in Brasília when it reaches 500,000 supporters. It could be a great time to fight the culture of abuse and silent violence against women.

Jair Bolsonaro and Julien Blanc do not represent new ideas. They are personalities that grow and feed on the still wide conception that women should be overpowered. The novelty is in the form of current campaigns. In each of these collective manifestations, what we see is the feeling that tolerance to violence against women denigrates much more than the few who defend it. Perhaps the end of their public careers does not mean the end of the culture of women oppression, but they will be promising victories of the power of online actions and the invitation to multiply them.



DIGITAL RIGHTS: LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

The Internet is a decentralized global network that makes communication, information and learning easier. Basic democratic practices, such as discussing matters of public interest and participating in the political process, will be increasingly related to the digital world. This publication presents an overview of the most relevant issues in the area of Digital Law in Latin American countries, as a result of the Project “Digital Rights: Latin America and the Caribbean”, an International Newsletter coordinated in Brazil by Professor and Researcher of FGV, Eduardo Magrani. The project emerged in 2012 as an initiative of leading Latin American think tanks working on issues related to Internet regulation and governance interested in consolidating Human Rights in the digital world. The regulation of net neutrality, the regulation of copyright and the responsibility of intermediaries, restrictions on freedom of expression by electronic means and data protection policies are some of the themes that can be found in this work of selected articles. Being informed about these subjects is a fundamental requirement for promoting dialogue and consensus around these issues. This publication is intended to be a useful tool for a broad community of stakeholders interested in the Digital Law landscape in Latin America.

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