

Background and context

Across Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) are under attack, in particular access to safe abortions. The people working to enable women's access to safe abortions are also under attack. ICTs and the internet ¹ have become vital in organising and documentation of activists' work to defend SRHR, to support the women seeking safe abortions, and in countering feelings of loneliness and isolation faced by the people stigmatised for either choosing abortion, or advancing pro-choice battles. This paper ² summarises an 18 month long study of this context: it analyses the risks and attacks pro-choice activists face online and offline; how their activism is interwoven with interpersonal networks of support; and the trade-offs between being vocal online for human rights, while needing to minimise their online visibility to prevent adversaries from profiling, identifying, tracking, and silencing them.

The study has been developed organically through the activists, scholars, technologists and artists associated with Tactical Tech's Gender and Technology Institute (GTI) network in Latin America. GTIs are regional gatherings of women and women-identifying human rights defenders where they are trained in key concepts and practices of holistic approaches to digital security, privacy and the politics of data, gender and technology to address online and offline harassment they face. Between June 2016 and September 2017, Tactical Tech has organised three GTIs – in Quito, Kuala Lumpur, and Panama City – that 122 women activists have attended.

In partnership with skilled local facilitators who develop the curricula for the GTI, participants are given hands-on training during the event, and are encouraged to take their learning to their communities through follow-on events. Many pro-choice activists from across the LAC region have attended the two GTIs organised in the region. Their cultural, social, and interpersonal contexts of activism have informed the

1 This report uses the phrase 'ICTs and the internet' to refer to the range of information and communications technologies that are both digital and analog. This is abbreviated in the text to just ICTs to make for easy reading.

2 This research began in 2015 as a short investigation into the targeted attacks on pro-choice activists in LAC. This was published in the August 2016 issue of the Arrow for Change bulletin, "Sexuality, Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, and the Internet <http://arrow.org.my/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/AFC22.1-2016.pdf>". The Spanish version of the bulletin is available here: <http://arrow.org.my/publication/arrow-change-sexuality-srhr-internet-spanish/>. The present paper is a short summary in English of the original Spanish language research, which will be available on Tactical Tech's website in the coming months.

development of training curricula on digital security and privacy. To assess regional particularities, preparatory meetings are held several months prior to the GTI. In these meetings local women human right defenders (WHRDs) and facilitators discuss the current panorama of online and offline violence and shape the curriculum and facilitation methodologies for the GTI.

Post-GTI networks of hands-on technical support, and emotional and political solidarity have also grown. It was through these different streams of interaction that this research developed. For instance one of the conclusions of the plenary session of the Quito GTI was to learn more about the contexts of pro-choice activists so they could be supported to engage more with privacy and digital security practices. This was how many participants came forward to support this research by recommending people who could be interviewed, or spreading the call for the online survey.

The research is based on 55 testimonies, 38 responses to an online survey, 17 in-depth interviews, and the analysis of 14 pro-choice websites. The respondents are pro-choice activists, technologists, and volunteers who provide direct support, services and counseling to women accessing abortions. The research finds that the internet is a strategic tool in continuing to provide support for women when face to face outreach and support is too risky and would subject activists to physical or psychological threats. However, organising in digital space exposes activists and their networks to risks and vulnerabilities where a lack of access to holistic security resources undermines their capacity to collectively adopt secure practices.

Following this background, the introduction contextualises abortion in LAC and why the internet is an integral part of the work of pro-choice activists. **Part 2** provides an overview of the **opportunities and challenges** related to their use of the internet to organise their work. **Part 3** explores how ICTs are strategically utilized to expand and strengthen the scope of pro choice activism. **Part 4** addresses the **risks and attacks** pro choice activists face. **Part 5** discuss **how pro-choice activists navigate those risks** and balance visibility and relative anonymity. **The final section** summarises key findings. Details of research methodology, and a glossary, are included in the **appendix**.



Image 1: Context

Introduction

The landscape of access to sexual and reproductive rights in LAC is dire. Out of 19 countries in Latin America, abortion is legal only in Cuba, Guyane, Puerto Rico and Uruguay. Abortion is accessible in Mexico only in its Federal districts. Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Dominican Republic prohibit abortion under all circumstances, with severe punishments for women suspected of having had one. Out of the 11 countries where abortion is allowed under certain circumstances, Guatemala, Panama and Venezuela allow it only when the pregnancy threatens the women's life. Even in contexts where abortion is legal or allowed in certain circumstances, women continue to face stigma, violence and discrimination.

Local activists interviewed in this research note changes in the landscape as governments and fundamentalist groups that have historically persecuted women who have had abortions are broadening their persecution, harassment, and intimidation to sexual and reproductive health rights activists and organizations.

"If women who are raped or whose lives or health are in danger seek abortion, generally they will be denied the option and this is due to two serious reasons. On one hand, the State prioritizes its moral beliefs and no one obeys the law. On the other hand, women don't know they have rights and that they should demand them from the State."

● (Interview respondent, Mexico)

Activists and scholars Claudia Anzorena and Rut Zurbriggen point at an "abortion debt" in the region, saying: *"Democratization processes are in debt with us who live in this region, and from the point of view of women who are directly affected - women who immigrate and refugees, young women and girls, disabled women, imprisoned women or those who are victims of human trafficking- these liabilities are specially relevant in this unequal context of reproductive oppression."*³

3 Anzorena, Claudia y Zurbriggen, Ruth. "Notas para pensar una experiencia de articulación por la ciudadanía sexual y reproductiva: la Campaña Nacional por el Derecho al Aborto Legal, Seguro y Gratuito de Argentina", 2016. Available at: <http://www.herramienta.com.ar/revista-herramienta-n-48/notas-para-pensar-una-experiencia-de-articulacion-por-la-ciudadania-sexual-> Recovered 26/07/2017

This “reproductive oppression” manifests as restrictions and obstacles against sexuality education, access to contraception and safe abortion in Latin America. This infringes upon a range of international human rights commitments that states have a responsibility to provide to their citizens, including the right to life, due diligence, privacy, health, physical and mental integrity free from cruel, inhumane and degrading treatment.

Moreover, access to safe abortion is also closely tied to anti discrimination and equality policies and actions. Vulnerabilities associated with being young, not formally educated, indigenous, Afro-descendant or rural are closely correlated with barriers to exercising these rights. The region does not provide the necessary conditions for women to exercise their rights to live free from violence due to deeply entrenched discrimination, sexism, and racism combined with poverty.

Both states and fundamentalist actors try to regulate and control women’s bodies through deliberate attacks on their safety and well-being. Gender based discrimination and violence experienced on the internet fosters violence in physical spaces as well. For example in Argentina, pro-choice clinics are subject to **escraches**⁴ - public shaming-, and the whereabouts of the clinics are usually located using online searches.

“In 2008, most clinics in Mendoza that provided abortion were raided. The only doctor that was providing abortion, at a reasonable price, and in a respectful manner, overwhelmed by the situation, closed down permanently”.

● (Interview respondent, Argentina)

In contexts where both state and fundamentalist entities target women’s safety and well-being through abortion bans and restrictions, activist networks become a lifeline by providing information, breaking feelings of isolation, and creating intimacy. In return, activists face online violence in the form of harassment, blackmail, defamation, censorship, information theft, surveillance, and death and rape threats.

4 All words highlighted in this document are included in the technical glossary at the end of this paper.

"When it comes to our challenges, we have three levels of audience: firstly, women and we want to reach out to all of them. We also want to influence men who work in legislation, that realm dominated by masculinity. And also church as an institution. We address decriminalisation and stigma, but there is a cultural framework that blames us for the work we do, for sharing information, for helping..."

● (Interview respondent, Ecuador)

The support networks investigated for this research share commonalities. First, they are generally informal groups that don't rely on formal structures to operate. This often translates to work on a voluntary basis and a lack of long term financial sustainability. Second, these networks are expressly feminist in their political orientation and practical approaches. Third, activists interviewed and consulted for this research operate on a shared understanding of solidarity based on trust and affinity.

"We're an activist network without funding at all. We financially support the project and people voluntarily, contribute sharing technical knowledge, training, helping with support and guidance in the network."

● (Interview respondent, Honduras)

"We're always facing economic difficulties. For example, we need to put credit on the cellphones, we need to cover internet infrastructure expenses. In order to maintain the ICTs, we need financial relief and most of the times we end up paying for it ourselves."

● (Interview respondent, Argentina)

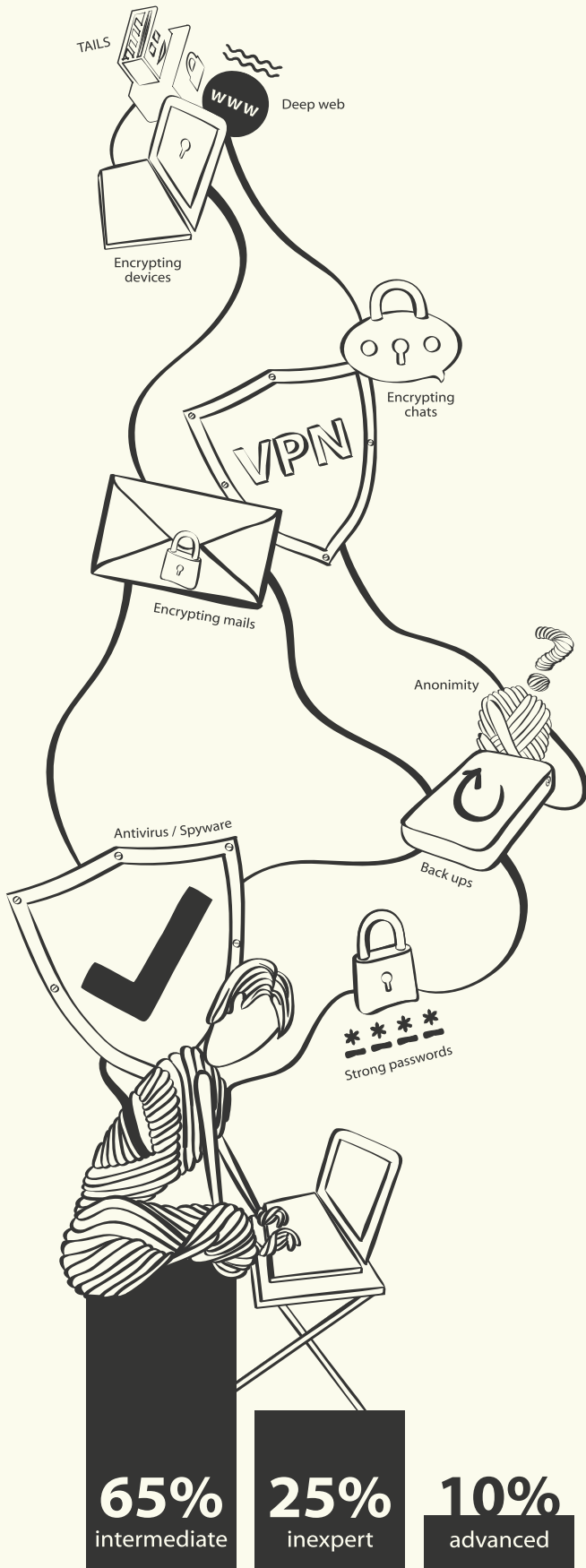
El colectivo Salud Mujeres, an activist network in Ecuador, says that information is both life changing and life saving. By providing essential information, such as how to perform safe abortions at home, they provide “real alternatives for women” in making informed choices for their own autonomy. In addition to calling for legal change and decriminalisation, the collective also functions as a helpline that women, who would otherwise not have access to critical information about their bodies, can call at certain hours and receive support.

The strong emphasis on solidarity in informal organising structures has consequences in terms of the way ICTs are used. For example, cell phones and social media are used on a voluntary and self-managed basis to form and interweave a feminist fabric across the internet. In that sense, pro-choice activism provides a much broader framework for achieving gender justice that includes but is not limited to decriminalisation of abortion.

“Feminist support networks that give information, methods, guidance and follow-ups must keep on going independently of the legalisation lobby because their purpose is wider. Ideally, abortion support networks should articulate with other networks that work with sexuality, reproductive cycles, women health, contraception, humanised birth, etc.”

● (Interview respondent, Chile)

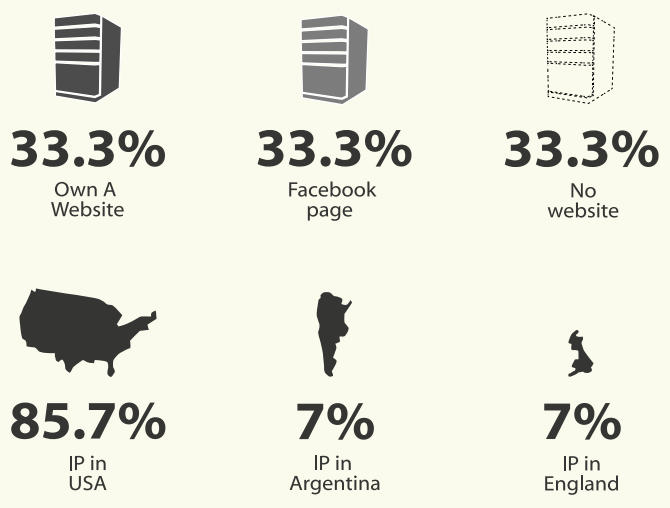
The next section will address how pro-choice activists use ICTs to conduct their work and its related challenges and opportunities.



KNOWLEDGE PERCEPTION

- ### USES OF DIGITAL TOOLS
- Provide information about their own organization /collective
 - Spread information about safe abortion
 - Establish personal communications with women who require information or support
 - Campaigning on digital social networks
 - Sharing personal experiences

SERVERS USES



TOOLS OF PRIVACY AND DIGITAL SECURITY

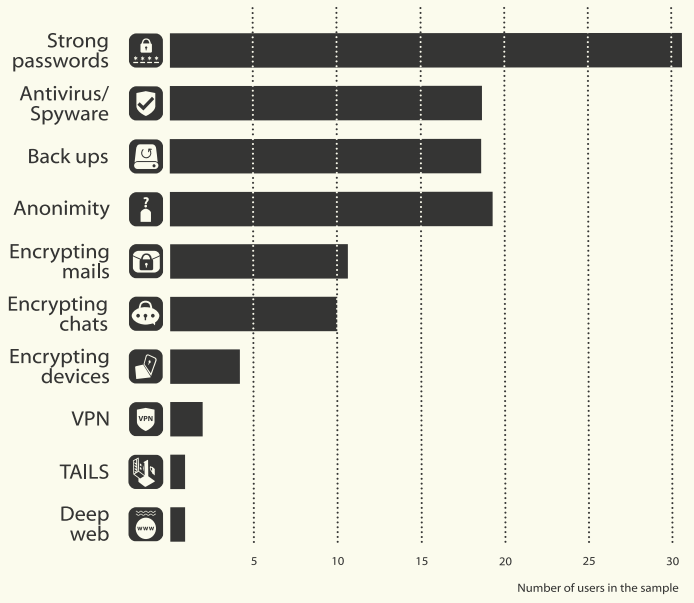


Image 2: Practices with ICT

Part 2: Opportunities and Challenges in using ICTs

"We're old school when it comes to ICTs: we meet up, we see each other, we communicate with coded language, we only pay attention to people who want to abort. It's a political decision and we do it out of personal conviction."

● (Interview respondent, Honduras)

"The role of ICTs is fundamental. For example, at the National Campaign of Socorristas en Red (Network Rescuers), we communicate through mailing lists. We are organizations that are present in different provinces within the country, in many localities, and we only meet face-to-face once a year. We absolutely depend on the Internet to communicate in our daily lives."

● (Interview respondent, Argentina)

The use of digital and analog communications methods are entwined and contingent on different factors, for example, the secrecy associated with accessing abortions, the geographic distance between activists and women who want support to access abortions, for example. Thus in some cases some women and those enabling access to abortion never meet each other and only communicate online. In other situations, communication is exclusively face to face and ICTs are rarely used. However, demographic and socioeconomic factors play a large role in the digital gap experienced by women. Adult women with scarce economic resources frequently find smartphones unobtainable, which limits the outreach of digital pro-choice activism.

"The persistent digital gap, mediated by socioeconomic and cultural factors, limits support to groups that have less income, indigenous origins, intergenerational exchanges, for example. This restriction is related with conceiving technologies as a goal or a product and not as a process that can transcend borders and differences, for example"

● (Interview respondent, Chile)

The internet and ICTs provide activists with new ways to generate and share information, raise their profile and visibility, reach new audiences and frontiers, do legal advocacy and outreach, produce new narratives and imaginaries. However, ICTs also expose activists to new vulnerabilities and risks, including online violence.

The research shows that the ICTs most frequently used are: social media platforms, commercial messaging apps, cellphones, commercial email accounts and websites. These technologies and platforms are primarily used for disseminating information about safe abortion and what their collectives are doing and can offer towards accessing abortions. Additionally, phone calls and instant chats are also used to form personal connections with women seeking information and support in order to counter their feelings of isolation, fear or guilt. Finally, campaigns for raising awareness and calling for decriminalisation are also commonly performed on social media platforms.

Most groups are inclined towards commercial platforms such as Facebook where they maintain personal profiles and collective fanpages that enabled them to create networks with other activists, potential allies, and women. Twitter is more heavily used for posting information for campaigning at national and regional levels. Whatsapp and Telegram are frequently noted instant messaging apps among the members of the networks. Notably Riseup's suite of services stand out as favourable options because of their privacy and encryption features.

"We work in a network and with direct contacts; we have met up in the past to talk about the protocol to use miso [...] but, basically, we are using mail, Whatsapp and Facebook to communicate".

● (Interview respondent, Nicaragua)

This research also demonstrates that online pro-choice activism in Latin America is subject to unfavourable data jurisdictions. The analysis of 14 websites showed that twelve of these are hosted in the United States, one in England, and one in Argentina. In addition, six websites provided contact details for connected individuals, such as website administrator or technical manager since the domain was not under privacy

protection. Several websites included contact forms collecting sensitive data such as email addresses and telephone numbers. In some cases, direct contact such as personal phone numbers and mails were publicly available on the sites.

Most activists based their privacy and digital security on strong passwords, antivirus and **antitrojan** software, and data backups. Nearly half of the interviewed participants indicate they use anonymous browsing tools such as the **Tor Browser**. However, most do not use **Virtual Private Networks (VPNs)**, TAILS, or know how to navigate the **deep web**

Although digital literacy in LAC is limited, especially in rural areas, people in cities are connected to the internet through smartphones. While this enables many women to be online, it exposes them to hostility and new forms of online violence on social media platforms that mirror or expand structural violence and discrimination routinely taking place. When the personal data of activists become visible they also become more likely to experience online violence, making protecting their contacts and sensitive data they might be collecting even more difficult.

Activists perceive ICTs as a source of new risks, security breaches and violence. Additionally, the lack of access to information and expertise in privacy and digital security can make them, and the public they work with, more vulnerable towards risks. Working with collectives that have scarce access to resources such as money, time, learning and training opportunities results in less adoption of safer tools.

There is awareness around how using safer tools and platforms in communication requires new commitments, including a shift in the understanding of what collective work looks like. Even with the intentions to develop digital self-care practices, collectives and groups struggle with the reality of how the women they support access ICTs and how the collectives and groups engage with them. As put up by one of the respondents:

“When a woman needs an abortion, the last thing on her mind is how to encrypt her email or navigating internet with Tor.”

● (Interview respondent, Chile)

Part 3: Empowering use of ICTs to 'weave' networks of support

"Most women reach us via internet or by word of mouth. I think internet enhances word of mouth, a communication channel that has always been essential for us."

● *(Interview respondent, Argentina)*

Facing systemic and structural violence, many Latin American women have organized themselves to share and build knowledge and establish support and solidarity networks. Some of these groups are also involved in national or international advocacy. For example, campaigns and reporting which target international human rights mechanisms such as CEDAW ⁵, CAT ⁶ and EPU ⁷ are common platforms where different groups engage in legal advocacy. Some collectives and groups engage in influencing the political agenda for the legalisation or the decriminalisation of abortion, but not all collectives or groups participate in advocacy activities.

How different networks complement one another by creating overlaps and synergies is critical in understanding how pro-choice activists use the internet to support one another and advance their activism. Some pro-choice groups also produce evidence and knowledge on the negative consequences of abortion bans, including how most vulnerable demographics are more susceptible to bare the costs of the abortion ban.

Such groups also monitor activities of anti-abortion groups i.e conservative actors pushing for anti-abortion agendas around the idea of a "constitutional protection of life from contraception" and awareness raising regarding the lack of regulation around "conscientious objection" and the "right to report". The right to report is often used to denounce women who go through underground abortions. Activists also underline insufficient protocols and guides related to the implementation and endorsement of legal and safe abortion" ^{8,9}

5 The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/> (1979)

6 The Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CAT.aspx> (1984)

7 Universal Periodic Review <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/UPR/Pages/UPRMain.aspx> (2011)

8 For example, in Peru where therapeutic abortion is legal since 1924 the protocol was only designed in 2014.

9 "Guía de incidencia para la promoción y defensa del derecho al aborto legal y seguro en Latinoamérica y el Caribe: guías metodológicas sobre Ecuador, República Dominicana y Chile", CLACAI, 2016

"Technology has also a very important role for activism, because it allows us to put our demands in the public space and make our actions visible. It also encourages people with similar concerns in providing support and solidarity in different ways from donating money to sharing publications to actively participating in feminist collectives."

● *(Interview respondent, Argentina)*

The pro-choice groups interviewed in this research tend to offer specific services, guidance, and support. Many helplines and websites provide adequate information about safe abortion so that women can make their own informed choices free from stigma. In that sense, a very important part of the work consists of targeted outreach, face-to-face interactions, and the creative use of ICTs to build solidarity with women who face isolation and loneliness as a result of the social stigma surrounding abortion. As put by one of the respondents:

"We like the face-to-face work because it is there where you can discuss what you think, what you know about abortion, who told you what. It is where you can dismantle myths and we will always prefer that option over the virtual one to be able to discuss a topic that hurts and that has fucked so many women's lives. For us, Facebook and Whatsapp have made this topic more accessible and affordable for women, but we always try to have first a face-to-face interview and then provide an accompaniment thanks to those digital tools."

● *(Interview respondent, Mexico)*

Respondents said that ICTs enable them to challenge the stigma associated with abortion by articulating new narratives. Testimonials compiled in this research describe empowering feminist campaigns online in which humorous and creative messages about abortion replace messages of pain and guilt traditionally associated with it.



Image 3: Empowering practices with ICT

Part 4: The grey area between risk and attacks

The use of ICTs is related to perceived risks and the types of attacks across a spectrum of political goals and opportunities for pro-choice activists. In this framework, it is important to distinguish between risks and attacks. Risks refer to the perception of the possible kinds of attacks activists may face during their work. Attacks reveal how adversaries target them in practice, even if some of those are difficult to prove.

“You are as safe as the person most at risk in your network” is a ‘traditional’ principle for establishing collective security protocols and practices. Such a perspective on security places an emphasis on the individual; but, activists interviewed here point towards more inclusive, collective practices. In doing so, they prompt a discourse shift. For example, as research shows, effective digital security is achieved when activists working together install, configure and use a particular tool rather than having the technical expertise lie with a certain individual in the network.¹⁰ However, holistic approaches suggest that security is more than about just the digital tools. Psychosocial, emotional and interpersonal factors also contribute to whether individuals and groups can practice security and feel secure.¹¹

All online activities leave a trace that can only be prevented, or erased, with close attention to settings across various devices and services. Online regulations also make it difficult to remain anonymous online. The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) requires that domain owners provide personal data such as name, address, email, telephone number, technical and administrative contacts; these appear in the **WHOIS** system and the **Domain Name System (DNS)** along with information about where the domain server is located. State surveillance is not uncommon in many LAC countries.¹²

10 Tactical Tech's research by Becky Kazansky discusses this in more detail in Security in context: Learning how HRDs learn digital security practices accessible online here: <https://secresearch.tacticaltech.org/study-1>

11 Holistic security' is the subject of a three-year long project undertaken by Tactical Tech and its partners and can be accessed online here: <https://holistic-security.tacticaltech.org/>

12 There is well-documented evidence that mobile surveillance software and hardware are purchased (see <https://es.globalvoices.org/2016/09/20/el-gobierno-mexicano-nuevamente-adquirio-costoso-software-de-espionaje-en-secreto/> and <https://www.derechosdigitales.org/wp-content/uploads/malware-para-la-vigilancia.pdf>)

There are two factors which prompt activists' attention to perceived risks. First, adversaries might intercept confidential data about pro-choice activists and the women they support, which can lead to criminalisation or ideological persecution. Second, the unexpected consequences of **metadata** trails. The information that is associated with our digital activities can become, for data brokers and governments, pathways to surveillance, or 'data-veillance', and targeted discrimination. This means activists need to be careful about the data traces they leave while organising because metadata that may seem harmless today, might put them at risk for exposure under future legislation, regulation, or business models.

Regarding attacks, we can see that in countries where the right to abortion is restricted or completely forbidden, pro-choice activists face a wide array of threats and attacks from governments and fundamentalist groups. Some attacks take place without sophisticated technical skills and only require coordinated actions among people; this is how pro-choice activists face online harassment, smear campaigns, reporting of their contents and profiles, doxxing, stealing of social media accounts, identity theft, and censoring websites.

Certain kinds of attacks require more technical or human infrastructure: malware infection and the use of targeted spyware, disinformation tactics in internet search engines, and cloning online services to redirect women seeking information about safe abortion towards anti-choice materials.

With offline attacks, we find that physical surveillance, job lay-off, and direct verbal and physical violence in public spaces are common tactics used against pro-choice activists. These tactics exemplify how online and offline violences are in a continuum and mirror and build on each other. The intensity and frequency of attacks is also possibly linked to the political context and how high on the political agenda the right to abortion is.

USES OF ICT

MAILS



Gmail



Riseup mail



Mailing lists

SOCIAL NETWORKS



Twitter



Facebook



Chats



we.riseup

INSTANT MESSAGING



Whatsapp



Skype



Chat for groups



Telegram



Signal

WEB



Google services



Websites



Platforms



Website information

TELEPHONY



Helplines



Office phones



Mobile phones



SMS

ACTIVITIES



Screenings



Awareness raising



Debates

LEGAL SITUATION

- I** Legal public health system
- II** Abortion is only allowed to protect the life and physical health of the woman, if the pregnancy is the result of a rape, or because of fetus impracticability
- III** Abortion is only allowed if the woman's life is in danger, and if a woman with a mental disability has been raped
- IV** Abortion is only permitted to protect the life and physical health of the woman, or if the pregnancy is the product of rape

- V** Abortion is only permitted to protect the life and physical health of the woman
- VI** Abortion is only permitted to protect the life of the woman
- VIII** Abortion prohibited altogether, or no explicit legal exception to save the life of a woman

RISKS

- a.** No reported risk
- b.** Ideological persecution
- c.** Doxxing

- d.** Access to sensitive information managed by the collectives by government or anti-rights groups
- e.** Theft of information to criminalize women who abort or accompany them
- f.** Impunity for hate crimes and femicide

ATTACKS

- 1.** No reported attacks
- 2.** Hacking of websites
- 3.** Cloning blogs
- 4.** Reporting contents
- 5.** Hacking social media accounts
- 6.** Censorship
- 7.** Malware and targeted phishing
- 8.** Reporting social media profiles
- 9.** Loss of information
- 10.** Surveillance in social networks by government and/or anti-rights groups
- 11.** Harassment and intimidation in social networks
- 12.** High ranking of anti choice groups websites/contents in search engines

- 13.** Anti-rights groups simulating to be a pro-choice group
- 14.** Intercepted telephones
- 15.** Cancellation of the phone number used by the helpline
- 16.** Threats by fundamentalists and anti-choice groups
- 17.** Job dismissals
- 18.** Direct threats by police
- 19.** Threats to pro choice groups through their helpline by anti rights group
- 20.** Fake and false information about misoprostol and abortion
- 21.** Judicial investigation related to the production of information about abortion
- 22.** Smearing and disinformation campaigns targeting pro choice activists
- 23.** Public actions of harassment of women activists and politicians
- 24.** Denunciations of women by hospitals
- 25.** Surveillance of organisations

COUNTRY	LEGAL	USES OF ICT	RISKS	ATTACKS
URUGUAY	I	f, [social media], G, [messaging]	b.	1.
MEXICO (DF)	I	S, www, [globe], [phone]	a.	1.
COLOMBIA	II	[social media], RISEUP, [messaging]	a.	2. 11. 16.
CHILE	II	[social media], [messaging], [phone], SMS	b.	8. 9. 10. 18. 23.
ECUADOR	III	[social media], [messaging], [phone], [SMS]	c.	13. 14. 15. 19.
MEXICO	IV	f, [social media], [messaging], [phone], SMS	a.	1.
ARGENTINA	IV	[social media], www, [messaging], [phone]	e.	4. 6. 8.
BOLIVIA	IV	[social media], f, [social media]	a.	5. 11. 17.
BRAZIL	IV	[social media], f, [social media], [messaging], [phone], [SMS]	b.	20.
PERU	V	f, [social media], [messaging], [phone]	b. d.	2. 3. 8. 11. 12. 17. 21.
GUATEMALA	VI	[social media], f, [social media], S	a.	16. 22.
DOMINICAN REP.	VIII	[social media], f	a.	7. 10. 14. 23.
HONDURAS	VIII	[social media], [social media], [social media], [social media], [social media], [social media], [social media]	b.	24. 25.
EL SALVADOR	VIII	[social media], f	f.	5. 8. 10. 23.
NICARAGUA	VIII	[social media], f, [social media], [social media]	f.	5. 8. 10. 23.

Image 4: Risks and attacks

Part 5: Anonymity versus visibility

“For us the paradox is: protect yourself until you can't communicate any more, or become visible until you are unprotected.”

● (Interview respondent, Brazil)

It is critical to explore active and deliberate choices made by pro-choice activists in navigating risks that come from exposure. Staying safe through reduced visibility online contradicts the visibility required in effective campaigning online; this is a pressing dilemma particularly for those engaged in awareness raising and advocacy online.

In the fight for bodily autonomy, activists and collectives realise that using ICTs entail new vulnerabilities and risks, some hard to grasp beforehand, some obvious and intrinsic to being online. The majority of the activists interviewed for this research feel forced to share a visible online persona, and perceive anonymity incompatible with their pro-choice activism. Activists often find themselves at the two extreme ends of the visibility regime: relative anonymity versus total exposure.¹³ This dilemma constantly effects how they navigate hostile environments as they try to maximise their outreach and manage risks that come with exposure.

“We expose ourselves and the people we love. Not intentionally but in the day to day hurricane, the pressure and demands blur what is important: privacy, looking after our data, who we share it with, in what way... Nowadays, using and committing politically with alternative communication channels is critical, at least that perspective can help in internalizing better, at least that works for me”

● (Interview respondent, Mexico)

13 This is discussed in detail in Tactical Tech's research published in 2016: Privacy, visibility and anonymity: Dilemmas in tech use by marginalised communities':

<https://tacticaltech.org/news/privacy-visibility-and-anonymity-dilemmas-tech-use-marginalised-communities>

Some pro-choice activists based in Argentina think of themselves as safe as long as they maintain their activities under the radar. On the other hand, the Las Libres collective in Mexico points out that for them complete visibility is a better protection strategy. Therefore, navigating the anonymity - visibility dilemma is highly contextual and is closely linked to the structure of political opportunities, the level of criminalisation and the everyday realities of activist communities.

Even when collectives decide to be public and visible they are still at risk of being silenced through censorship. Websites that disseminate information about abortion might fall under a jurisdiction where abortion is illegal. Therefore the website provider can block a particular website. Secondly, companies might cut off services when such sites are under **Distributed Denial of Service attacks (DDOS)** attacks to avoid negatively affecting their other clients. Website services that operate outside commercial interests, they might not be able to handle such attacks at a larger scale. Webpages hosted by commercial hosting services such as Facebook, Blogger or Youtube risk being blocked as a result of coordinated attack. This is why collectives require active and deliberate decision-making about where their websites are hosted, in as much as how they engage with commercial platforms. Terms of use and policies associated with platforms can risk pro-choice related content and advocacy.

Final considerations

This paper briefly summarises the courageous work of pro-choice activists who are forming networks of resistance, solidarity and support for women who lack necessary resources -legal, financial, physical or emotional- to access safe abortion in LAC. It demonstrates how pro-choice activists use ICTs and the internet deliberately and creatively to push frontiers and expand their outreach. However, even as ICTs provide them with new opportunities for strengthening their work, they also result in new vulnerabilities. Both in online and offline spaces, these collectives are harassed, attacked and criminalised for their political views and for sharing information about sexual and reproductive health and rights. The research also demonstrates how WHRDs and pro-choice activists opt for feminist frameworks in implementing

collective and holistic approaches to security. While this research encourages safer ICT uses and practices, it also acknowledges the need to develop specific resources for pro-choice activists. To reiterate, the key findings of this research are:

1. ICTs and the internet present strategic opportunities to build knowledge, establish ties between activist networks and women seeking abortions, counteract feelings of loneliness and isolation due to stigma, and engage in advocacy.
2. The research clearly illustrates pro-choice activists are prone to risks and vulnerabilities in their use of ICTs.
3. The research demonstrates that the internet and ICTs are used to complement field work of pro-choice activists and to organise anonymously when exposed to risk and threats.
4. The capacity of LAC pro-choice activists in dealing with digital attacks are uneven, and at times are overly dependent on the technical expertise of third parties.

This research also recognises the need to develop resources to reach out to women and allies living in urban, rural and remote areas. Linkages between such groups and digital protection networks should be strengthened to maintain safer communication and distribution of pro-choice content. Less dependence on commercial and mainstream platforms and applications can help strengthen resilience of pro-choice networks when they face online attacks.

Digital security is closely linked with physical integrity, self-care and psychosocial well-being. In a collective pursuit to ensure women's bodies are no longer battlegrounds, WHRDs, pro-choice activists and women they support will continue to work together to learn, share, articulate and experiment with technology.

I. GLOSSARY

Encryption: a technical method that encodes content (messages, files) in a way that only someone with the appropriate encryption key can access it. This method results in more secure communication and information channels.

DNS: better known as the "ending" of an URL (.net, .org, .com, .br, .hno, .fr). It stands for Domain Name System and is used to interpret and recognize the server's IP address in which the domain we want to access is stored.

DoS: Denial of service attack. Also known as DoS, an attack that seeks to make a machine or network resource unavailable to legitimate users. DoS attacks are achieved through flooding the server with information requests, to the extent it can't provide a service back any-more (Source: Wikipedia).

DDoS: Distributed denial of service. An extension of DoS attacks, in which the information petition flood is issued by various connection points. Generally DDoS is deployed through bot networks, rendering this attack one of the most common and efficient due to its technological simplicity.

"Escraches": in Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay and Spain, amongst other countries, refers to a type of protest in which a group of activists go to the home or work address to and individual to publicly shame the person or group of people. Based on a method of direct action, it aims to raise visibility around certain demands. (Source: Wikipedia).

Deepweb: invisible or hidden internet that isn't indexed by conventional search engines due to diverse factors. Computer scientist Mike Bergman is credited with coining the term. (Source: Wikipedia)

IP: Internet Protocol or IP is a digital data communication protocol. Its main task is to deliver data packets bidirectionally (origin/destination) through different physical networks that meet a series of standards (OSI standards). When a user connects to their internet connection, they are assigned an IP address. This address can change when the connection is re-established. The fact that an IP address can change makes it "dynamic". Internet sites, by nature permanently available, tend to have a static IP address, which means it doesn't change. Servers (that host mail, web services, ftp connections, etc.) generally have a static ip too in order to localize them easily. (Source: Wikipedia)

PII: Personally Identifiable Information, is used in information security and refers to the information that can be used (by its own or complemented with other sources of information) to identify, contact or localize a specific person. More legal definitions, specially in terms of honor, intimacy and privacy, vary according to each country. (Source Wikipedia).

Metadata: digital traces also imply data that is created in relation with your content and most of it is invisible. These traces are generally created indirectly without you even realizing and without your consent. For example, your browser habits and IP address are exchanged between the different web sites and services you navigate with the intention of monitoring your behaviour and try to sell you products through advertisement. (Source: "Zen and the art of making tech work for you").

Anti-Trojans: a trojan is an apparently legitimate program that hides malicious code (malware), generally aimed at opening access to an attacker so that they can make changes in the device without the user knowing. Anti-trojans refer to a specific type of anti-virus software for computers.

VPN: Virtual Private Network extends a private network across a public network, and enables users to send and receive data across shared or public networks as if their computing devices were directly connected to the private network. Virtual connections are established end-to-end (between sender and recipient) and are dedicated (solely intended for that specific connection). They can be fully or partially encrypted. (Source: Wikipedia)

WHOIS: TCP protocol by which you can search in a database who is a specific domain or IP address owner on the internet. WHOIS requests were originally performed via command line but, nowadays, there are plenty of websites that allow you to do this search. (Source: Wikipedia)

To learn more about digital security and privacy take a look at Security in a Box and Me and My Shadow

<https://securityinabox.org>

<https://myshadow.org>

APPENDICES



LEGAL STATUS OF ABORTION

- Without restriction
- Allowed under some grounds
- Penalized in all its forms



Interviews



Questionnaires



Total accounts

Countries not included in the study ○

* At the moment of the research, Chile penalized abortion in all its forms, since March 2016 it allows abortion under three grounds

Image 5: Data collected by the research

II. METHODOLOGY

This research is framed by Tactical Tech's 'Do-Not-Harm' approach which puts the safety and well-being of target groups and the specific communities they represent at the centre of all activities. It starts with the decision to start with research in a specific time and location in a way that will not overtly endanger any of the involved individuals and organizations. These decisions are accompanied by a contingency planning conversation, in order to be prepared for unexpected eventualities, and to assess how sensible data collected will be managed. Secondly, the Do-Not-Harm policy considers whether the cost of doing a research is worth the possible outcome by determining if the available time and resources will be fruitful for all the groups and individuals involved.

This research depends on a 'triangular' methodology that combines qualitative and quantitative techniques. We believe that complementing methodologies enhance the research by enabling multiple levels of analysis thereby providing a multi-dimensional view of the problem.

This research focuses on websites and social networks used by pro-choice activists and collectives. The research looks at how much Personally Identifiable Information (PII) is available through use of these sites. While doing so the research also puts itself in the shoes of adversaries interested in uncovering pro-choice activists' anonymity.

The research also tries to better understand how activists and their groups operate on Internet and using ICTs and how online communities emerge forming cross border solidarity. To do so, 14 websites and 14 Twitter accounts were analysed along with in depth interviews.

The qualitative research is composed of the following components: Desktop research, an online survey filled by 38 activists and 17 in depth interviews audio recorded or answered over email.

Interviews focused on four wide questions around the use of the internet and ICTs:

1. How do activists use ICTs?
2. How ICTs benefit pro-choice activism?
3. What are emerging risks and attacks?
4. What do activists need in order to move forward with their activism?

17 interviews from ten LAC countries were conducted in the span of 12 months (from December 2015 to December 2016) through snowball sampling. This is a non-probability sampling technique, which is particularly useful when trying to interview groups that are hard to access either due to stigmatisation or criminalisation. This was a simple and efficient process based on trust in which one person recommends the other. However, a drawback is that there isn't much control on the sampling method, therefore samples aren't necessarily representative. We chose this technique because our research doesn't aim to be representative of all LAC pro-choice activism, but rather aims to map and build knowledge around how activists use ICTs in a wide array of country contexts.

Together with the interviews, we carried out an online questionnaire made up of seven open-ended questions and eight close-ended questions. This questionnaire seeks to dive into motivations that guide pro-choice activisms, perspectives on lived risks and ICTs and the tools to sustain privacy and security. Finally, questions were aimed at understanding how ICTs are perceived, as well as trying to get insight into the learning and knowledge sharing process. 38 pro-choice activists from 13 countries in LAC responded to the survey. This data set complements qualitative interviews and helps us comprehend nuances in the different national contexts. The following table sums up the number of testimonies (interviews and questionnaires) analysed for this research.

Overall we worked with 23 testimonies (interviews and questionnaires) from activists operating in five countries where abortion was still completely prohibited (El Salvador, Nicaragua, Honduras, Dominican Republic and Chile). However in 2017 Chile passed a new law that enables women to access abortion under specific circumstances.

We obtained 31 testimonies from eight countries in which abortion is allowed under specific circumstances and we had one testimony from Uruguay, the only country in our sample where abortion is legalised.

In September 2017 Tactical Technology Collective organised the "Gender and Technology Institute: Take Control of Your Data" in partnership with Women Help Women. 35 women activists involved in networks that provide information, counseling and/or direct support for women seeking safe abortions participated in the event. They were supported by 12 women facilitators from multidisciplinary backgrounds. This group reviewed the results of the study and verified its claims and outcomes.

III. REFERENCES

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