Almost 30 Years Later: Anti-Femicide Activism in Mexico from 1993 to 2022

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Abstract

What factors have influenced the strategies of the anti-femicide social movement, and what has this movement accomplished after continuously advocating for almost 30 years? Analyzing news articles, scholarly journals, books on social movements, and Twitter accounts, I argue that the inaction of the government was a root cause of the movement’s change in strategies, from peaceful petitions to highly visible vandalism, and that institutional barriers prevent progress on this issue even in the current day. I demonstrate that transnational activism through international institutions such as the United Nations had a limited impact on effecting domestic change but that using social media to spread awareness of femicide as an issue was effective in promoting transnational solidarity. Finally, I argue that the anti-femicide movement had success in raising awareness of femicide and gaining legislation that criminalized femicide, even if femicide still remains a national issue. Analyzing the strategic shifts in the anti-femicide movement allows one to understand why social movements must adapt their strategies to the political opportunities they are faced with. Moreover, femicide is a global issue, and understanding the achievements and limitations of the movement can help other activist groups create their own strategies in their respective countries.

Introduction

“Que tiemble el Estado, los cielos, las called / Que tiemblen los jueces y los judiciales / Hoy a las mujeres nos quitan la calma.” These lyrics translate to “May the State, the sky, the streets tremble / may the judges and policemen be afraid / Today, peace is taken away from us women” (Laszewicki, 2022). These are the opening lines to a popular femicide protest song known as “Cancion sin Miedo,” or “Song Without Fear,” sung as both a tribute and a statement of rage by Mexican women (Laszewicki, 2022).

The Mexican anti-femicide movement began in 1993 after an incident of mass femicide in Ciudad Juarez, where maquiladora (factory) employee Alma Farel became the first recorded case of femicide (COW Latin America, 2021). Femicide,
defined as “the killing of a female specifically because she is a female” (Álvarez-Garavito & Acosta-González, 2021, p. 13), remains a pressing issue 30 years later, as an average of 10 women a day are victims of femicide (Rios, 2022). Indigenous women are even more likely than non-Indigenous women to experience femicide (Frias, 2021, p. 10).

The anti-femicide movement has advocated for national attention and fundamental change to an issue that affects every Mexican woman, whether she is an elite legislator or a working-class factory employee. Anti-femicide activists face a deeply gendered government that limits their political opportunity structure, yet they were successful in their advocacy for the passage of the General Law on Women’s Access to a Life Free of Violence. This 2007 law has not been widely enforced, however, and activists are still calling for an end to femicide.

What factors have affected the strategies of the 30-year anti-femicide movement in Mexico, and what are its accomplishments? In this paper, I examine the strategies and objectives of this movement, how transnational activism has influenced the case of anti-femicide activism, and finally, the barriers to success and outcomes of this activism. I argue that the strategies of the movement have changed over time because of a lack of action from the Mexican government, even while the objective has consistently been to gain recognition and legal protection. Moreover, transnational activism has pressured the Mexican government to listen to domestic activists, but this international pressure has fallen short of effecting lasting change. Finally, the achievements of the anti-femicide movement have been few and far between, thanks to entrenched institutional barriers such as dismissal from federal and local politicians and internal class divisions within the movement.

Demands of the Anti-Femicide Movement

The anti-femicide movement in Mexico has been prevalent for almost 30 years, and their demands for recognition and protection of women’s social and legal status have remained constant throughout the movement. The anti-femicide movement has not focused its attention on representation in the political system, instead focusing on changing political institutions by using outside pressure. Earlier women-dominated social movements in Mexico stemmed from the need to survive, targeting government policy that undermined their right to a vida digna, or dignified life (Craske, 1999, p. 121). The anti-femicide movement also is a direct result of these interests, as the very lives of Mexican women are jeopardized daily.

The demand for recognition refers to the demand to have your concern viewed as legitimate (Orvis & Drogus, 2020, p. 118). Earlier campaigns, such as the 2004–2009 Justicia Postcard Campaign, to be discussed later, demonstrate that before activists could argue for specific legislation, they had to bring this problem to the center of political discussions. Even now, anti-femicide activists must fight to
President Obrador has stated that he has no interest in addressing the problem of femicide, as he believes “that progress has been made to defend women’s rights” (Reuters, 2022), although this progress has not addressed how 10 women become victims of femicide daily (Rios, 2022). Anti-femicide activists have centered their activism on promoting women’s social, legal, and economic status. For example, the fight to criminalize femicide resulted in the federal General Law on Women’s Access to a Life Free of Violence, which criminalized femicide in 2007 (García-Del Moral, 2020, p. 845).

In August 2019, activists met with the mayor of Mexico City, Claudia Sheinbaum, to present their demands, and this direct pressure resulted in the creation of a registry of sex offenders, which was one of their demands (Villegas, 2020). Moreover, in the anti-femicide protests in 2020, activists demanded the creation of a prosecutor’s office for femicide and disappearance cases, in addition to pushing federal government officials and the mayor of Mexico City to promote reproductive rights and equal pay (Villegas, 2020). Because earlier activists in the Justicia Campaign had been able to raise awareness about femicide and to keep public attention on this issue, this allowed others in later stages of the movement to devote their attention to directly pressure the government for change. This demonstrates how movements do not rely on one strategy but instead must identify key moments to act and to decide what is the most effective strategy to achieve their goals.

Strategies of the Movement Over Time: From Postcards to Burning Doors

Anti-femicide movements have used multiple strategies to pressure their governments into action, starting with peaceful postcard campaigns and strikes, and moving to a recent emphasis on utilizing violence in demonstrations. Social movements are contextualized within their society, which gives them particular resources, cultural context, and political opportunity structure within which they can operate (Orvis & Drogus, 2020, p. 223). Regional context is important in understanding why social movements in Latin America may operate differently than their counterparts in the United States or Europe. For example, European social movements see the erosion of state legitimacy as a moment for political opportunity (Escobar and Alvarez, 1992, p. 53). When the state is losing power, there is an increase in political opportunity for social movements to act and monopolize this uncertainty of power. In comparison, constant state impunity, rather than state power erosion, caused the anti-femicide movement in Mexico to change its strategies over time, as a response to the hostile political opportunity structure. It is the strength, not the erosion, of state power that has shaped the anti-femicide movement.

In Mexico, the state itself is a roadblock to progress because of the difficulty that interest groups face in accessing decision-making spaces (Craske, 1999, p. 187).
Among activist circles, there are discussions on how femicide is a “misogynous genocide resulting from the state’s ‘failure to provide women with guarantees or with conditions of safety’ and hence a ‘state crime’” (García-Del Moral, 2020, p. 858). The Mexican government has continued to be virtually complicit in the issue since 1993. The anti-femicide movement is a broad coalition of elite and working-class women, who face various institutional and cultural setbacks. Elite women in the legislature face a gendered institution that limits their ability to pass legislation, whereas working-class women have to struggle to even get a say in the political process. In response to these various barriers, activists have employed both peaceful and violent strategies to bring attention to the issue of femicide.

The earlier years of the anti-femicide movement embodied the concept of coadyuvante, the goal for state and federal governments to cooperate with anti-femicide advocates in addressing the problem of femicide (Serviss, 2013, p. 614). One of the earliest campaigns from the anti-femicide movement was the Justicia Postcard Campaign, led by the organization Justicia Para Nuestras Hijas, from 2004 to 2009. The goal of this postcard campaign was to raise awareness of femicide by discussing it in mainstream public discourse. The postcards had two sections. The top was a “funeral prayer card” that the recipient kept and that displayed the victim’s biography and the context of her death and disappearance (Serviss, 2013, p. 620). The bottom section would then be mailed to government officials to petition them to change their laws around femicide (Serviss, 2013, p. 620). These postcards were also used to build solidarity among the activist groups at the time in their collective call to end femicide, while also allowing the families of the victims to monitor how their daughters’ identities were used, as they wanted the recipients to see “an individual girl rather than a dead prostitute” (Serviss, 2013). In this way, activists were able to add a personal layer to their campaign to spread awareness without minimizing the victim to a political martyr. Moreover, because this peaceful campaign targeted legislators to either change or introduce legislation that targeted the problem of femicide, it clearly demonstrates that the concept of coadyuvante was prevalent in the early anti-femicide movement (Serviss, 2013, p. 619).

After years of government inaction and a lack of meaningful progress on ending femicide, the movement reached a watershed point in 2019. In what is now known as the Glitter Revolution, protestors in Mexico City dumped pink glitter on officials who were complicit in the mishandling of the sexual assault and the murder of a minor (Rios, 2022). This highly visible action carries weight, as “glitter bombing is not only visually striking as it identifies and publicly shames the enemy; it’s also force-free. . . . Pink glitter became a vivid reminder that women’s patience had been tested to the limits and that direct action was the next step in a mounting struggle” (Garza, 2020, p. 54). Since 2019, there has been a shift toward the use of vandalism, especially with spray paint. During the Glitter Revolution, protestors spray-painted the historic Ángel de la Independencia monument with the accusatory message “The
Motherland Kills” (Rios, 2022). This tactic is used to make society and the Mexican government question which has more value: property, or the lives of women and girls across the country (Rios, 2022). Highly visible strategies such as vandalism and dumping glitter serve as “political performances,” which aim to garner widespread attention to legitimize activists’ demands for change (Orvis & Drogus, 2020, p. 224).

In 2020, women went on a strike to demonstrate just how powerful the absence of women is, as they refused to show up for work, school, and even government meetings with President Obrador (Villegas, 2020). This action was advertised through the hashtag #UnDiaSinNosotros, A Day Without Us. The day after, the women returned to the streets in mass protests, participating in vandalism and violence (Villegas, 2020). Femicide continued to haunt the reality of Mexican women, and this grievance against the state resulted in the takeover of the National Human Rights Commission in September of 2020. Protestors wanted to highlight that many laws are in favor of women’s rights but that those in power routinely fail to enforce those laws, perpetuating a deadly environment for women (Rios, 2022).

Although the anti-femicide movement may have started with the goal of coadyuvante, it is clear that activists have lost faith in their government to collaborate with them. The most recent demonstration was on International Women’s Day 2022, when protestors set fire to the door of government buildings in Monterrey (Reuters, 2022). This demonstrates that nearly 30 years of inaction and lack of government accountability have made the anti-femicide movement shift toward employing violence to keep the attention on their movement.

Mobilization Through Social Media: Solidarity and Backlash

Social media has become a strategy for social activism of its own kind, evident in the mobilization of protest movements such as Occupy and the Arab Spring (Orvis & Drogus, 2020, p. 228). Hashtag campaigns are now even considered a repertoire for social movements, given an increasing interdependence between the virtual and tangible worlds (Rovira-Sancho, 2023). Social media has the capacity to bypass mainstream media and quickly spread a movement’s grievances and demands in order to provide a democratic, horizontal public space for many individuals to engage in dialogue on pressing issues, air their grievances, and spread innovative ideas (Orvis & Drogus, 2020, p. 225). The ease of communication and sharing of information shows users that others think like them, which makes it more likely for them to speak out or join the movement (Orvis & Drogus, 2020, p. 225). The existing theory also discusses that social media can lead to slacktivism, a “low cost, low commitment activism that has little impact” (Orvis & Drogus, 2020, p. 224). An example of slacktivism is an individual posting on their Instagram story to feel as if they have contributed to a larger dialogue, despite exerting little to no actual pressure on larger societal forces. Social media must therefore be used strategically in
movements to avoid slacktivism. Although the threat of slacktivism is real, this case of Mexico shows there is also potential for political backlash on social media platforms.

The anti-femicide movement has used various hashtags to spread information and raise awareness about their cause, beginning in 2015 with the #NiUnaMenos (Not One More) and #RopaSucia (Dirty Laundry). #NiUnaMenos became a rallying cry in Argentina because activists were protesting femicide within their own country. For Mexican anti-femicide activists, this hashtag amplified their own cries for change within their country (Alcolba & McGowan, 2020). The resonance of #NiUnaMenos in many Latin American countries, including Mexico, demonstrates the use of social media in facilitating cross-border solidarity. The popularity and resonance of #NiUnaMenos also demonstrate how social media can facilitate social movements by lowering the cost of creating and organizing movements and allowing for action to take place without requiring the physical presence of individuals (Orvis & Drogus, 2020, p. 225). The ease of communication and sharing of information shows users that others think like them, which makes it more likely for them to speak out or join the movement (Orvis & Drogus, 2020, p. 225).

#RopaSucia gained popularity in 2015 and was used to call out perpetrators of misogyny in academic circles, as a way of calling out those complicit in the perpetuation of misogynistic cultural views and gender discrimination (Garza, 2020, p. 51). Sexist comments allow for a greater societal attitude that dismisses gendered violence, leading to the perpetuation of large-scale crimes such as femicide. In a movement that targets gendered violence, women not only have to address complicit political structures but also challenge the society around them that normalizes misogyny and sexism. Moreover, when the main tactic of repressing voices speaking out against gendered violence is silencing voices, social media becomes a realm where massive numbers of stories can be shared, creating the conclusion that all stories shared are true (Rovira-Sancho, 2023). Two years later, in 2017, #SiMeMantan (If They Kill Me) was created to respond to the unfair accusations placed on femicide victims to justify their murders. The hashtag was inspired by the death of Lesvy Osorio, who was brutally murdered at the National Autonomous University of Mexico. After her death, the media blamed Osorio for her own death, rather than blaming the man who murdered her (Soloff, 2019). By 2017, 24,000 women had been victims of femicide (Soloff, 2019), yet the media continued to blame the victims rather than the murderers. The goal of this hashtag was to tweet small, trivial things that might be held against a woman one day if the woman was murdered. The overarching question here is, If they kill me, what will they say to blame me for my own death? (Soloff, 2019). In the same way that #RopaSucia calls out normalized incidents of misogyny, #SiMeMantan calls out the victim-blaming that has been placed on femicide victims since Ciudad Juarez. Challenging harmful
societal norms is as key to ending gendered violence as is challenging harmful institutional norms and practices.

Moving toward the present day, #UnDiaSinNosotros (A Day Without Us) was used in 2020 to show the world what the lack of women’s presence would look like, as many women did not attend school or work on this day (Villegas, 2020). This hashtag was not the demonstration itself but instead was used to display the actions of demonstrators instead of relying on mainstream news sources to convey their message.

Some hashtags have been used in backlash to the anti-femicide movement, such as #EllasNoMeRepresentan (They Do Not Represent Me). In this online movement, women denounced the actions of anti-femicide protestors to separate themselves from the movement (Rios, 2022). Specifically, the women who used this hashtag were responding to the violent demonstrations that protestors engaged in during the Glitter Revolution, citing that violence delegitimizes valid complaints against the state (Palacios, 2019). For example, Twitter user @RossyTB tweeted, “The feminists are a group subsidized by dark interests . . . people who have lost their privileges and want a confrontation” (2020, translated from Spanish). This tweet demonstrates how people do not see violence as a respectable activist strategy and how controversial acts can divide public opinion about supporting the movement. Furthermore, the online backlash demonstrates how activists can use social media to their advantage, but so can their opponents. This makes social media another realm for political battles to be fought as both parties look to stay in the dominant discourse of the public.

The Boomerang Effect and Cultural Relevance in Transnational Activism

The use of social media brings one to the conversation of transnational activism, which was discussed above in the example of the #NiUnaMenos campaign and cross-border solidarity. Beyond social media, activists have employed the use of international organizations to pressure their governments, ranging from the Inter-American Court of Human Rights to the United Nations (UN). Specifically, the UN plays a vital role in dispersing global norms as well as fostering global debate (Craske, 1999, pp. 178–180). The UN also promotes a “gender-aware” approach to program implementation, in which women are integral to projects that are promoted by global institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank (Craske, 1999, pp. 179–180).

The support from these international organizations can invoke the boomerang effect, which means activists employ these international networks to find information, money, and political support from more-powerful nations to pressure their domestic governments (Paxton et al., 2020, p. 209). An example of an international treaty that both promotes women’s rights as a global norm and provides
an opportunity for the boomerang effect is the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discriminations Against Women (CEDAW). This is the most important treaty for women’s rights internationally, as it demands that countries change their laws to help women address discrimination across a broad array of categories, including education and family law (Paxton et al., 2020, p. 212). Mexico ratified the CEDAW in 1981 and the Optional Protocol in 2002 (United Nations Human Rights Treaty Bodies, n.d.). The CEDAW and Optional Protocol are important tools for activists to use in placing international pressure on Mexico to address femicide. The Optional Protocol allows complaints to be made against the state for the systematic violation of UN treaties, including CEDAW (International Justice Resource Center, 2018), and allows the CEDAW committee to investigate systemic violations of women’s rights in a specific country (Paxton et al., 2020, p. 214). Using these international treaties, activist organizations such as the Mesa de Mujeres and Católicas por el Derecho a Decidir present information on femicide, including accusations of impunity against the state, to the CEDAW Committee (Olsson, 2017, pp. 20, 28), maintaining femicide as an issue on the agenda for the international committee.

Although international norms such as CEDAW increase pressure on domestic governments, this does not always equate to change, as even after international organizations pressured Mexican government officials, there was no action taken to address femicide. For example, the Inter-American Court on Human Rights passed down the Cotton Fields decision in 2009, stating that the Mexican government must improve its investigations into femicides and take steps to prevent this violence (Vivanco, 2020). Earlier, this intergovernmental body had also pushed for the passage of the 2007 General Law on Women’s Access to a Life Free of Violence (Vivanco, 2020), which nationally criminalized femicide and recognized that femicide violates a woman’s human rights (García-Del Moral, 2020, p. 845). The General Law on Women’s Access to a Life Free of Violence law was passed, but as indicated by the later 2020 Takeover of the National Human Rights Commission demonstration, this law was not as effective as activists had hoped for. Moreover, even if court decisions are passed down by courts such as the Inter-American Court on Human Rights, international agreements, such as CEDAW, are not legally binding (Paxton et al., 2020, p. 213), meaning that countries can become signatories to these progressive documents without having any intention to follow through on their promises.

International organizations must understand the cultural and political dynamics of a domestic movement when conducting advocacy efforts; otherwise, they may fall short of their intended goal. This is evident in tensions between domestic and international anti-femicide movements in Ciudad Juarez, the Mexican border town where the first recorded femicides occurred (García-Del Moral, 2020, p. 846). Some international organizations contextualized their movements in a way
that did not resonate with the local culture, which undermined their effectiveness when compared to domestic organizations that operated culturally relevant anti-femicide movements (Starr, 2017, pp. 1367–1373). Moreover, transnational activism carries the risk of being viewed as the Global North imposing its beliefs onto other countries, subsequently being perceived as bourgeois or imperialist, especially when it leaves out the voices of activists in the Global South (Paxton et al., 2020, p. 203). Some North American feminists have ignored the voices of Latin American women, incorrectly believing the misconstrued notion that Latin American women do not see themselves as feminists (Escobar & Alvarez, 1992, p. 207). This ideology undermined potential international solidarity across feminist groups. Even if some anti-femicide groups still do not actively identify themselves as feminists, they are advocating for an end to gendered violence, a common goal across groups regardless of political label. International organizations and advocacy groups must therefore communicate with local populations to best support domestic activists, as this will give them a nuanced understanding of the domestic activists’ cultures. Simply, greater cultural resonance yields more effective international movements.

Outcomes of the Anti-Femicide Movement

Insofar as the anti-femicide social movement can be categorized under contentious politics, the achievements of the anti-femicide movement can be analyzed under the goals of social movements. As mentioned above, those goals include achieving recognition and securing women’s legal protection. Anti-femicide activists have advocated for recognition of the problem of femicide, evident in the Justicia Postcard Campaign, the increasingly violent strategies of the movement, and the #UnDiaSinNosotros demonstration. Achieving and maintaining recognition among the public and with government officials is important, as it ensures that one’s issue has a voice in national political debates. For example, in 2019, after the Glitter Revolution that caught the nation’s attention, Mexico City and 19 Mexican states issued a gender violence alert (Sandin, 2020). The issue of femicide is not unique to Mexico, and the use of social media such as #NiUnaMas allows for the issue to be recognized globally and fosters solidarity across borders.

The efforts of activists to gain recognition across Mexico have aided activists in changing state legislation regarding the legal status of femicide. Activists targeted policy change and output, common focuses of contentious politics (Orvis & Drogus, 2020, p. 229). In 2007, the General Law on Women’s Access to a Life Free of Violence was passed, criminalizing femicide nationally (García-Del Moral, 2020, p. 845). This law also identified femicide as a violation of a woman’s human rights and addressed the state’s tolerance of this crime (García-Del Moral, 2020, p. 845). The 2012 reform to Article 325 of Mexico’s federal criminal code codified femicide as a gendered crime and provided provisions for prosecuting public servants who delay justice for
victims (García-Del Moral, 2020, p. 845). Moreover, this reform recognizes the state’s role in perpetuating femicide and violence and “made the state itself a target of its own punitive power” (García-Del Moral, 2020, p. 845). The limits of structural power are one of the reasons femicide is perpetuated, as only 7% of crimes are reported and 3% end in a sentence (Spain’s news, 2019), so this reform is significant because it recognizes how the state perpetuates the problem. Reforms were also made in 2020 in Mexico City after Mayor Claudia Sheinbaum met with women’s interest groups. These meetings resulted in the creation of a registry of sex offenders and the passage of a local ordinance that criminalized the nonconsensual sharing of sexual content (Villegas, 2020). It is important to note that these reforms came after mass violent protests (Villegas, 2020).

External and Internal Challenges to the Movement

The anti-femicide movement has faced enormous barriers that have limited its ability to bring about policy change in the state in terms of action against perpetrators of femicide, as high impunity rates still prevent perpetrators from facing institutional consequences. Contentious politics, such as social movements, are affected by state capacity to respond as well as by strong internal solidarity and mobilization strategies (Orvis & Drogus, 2020, pp. 229–231). To begin, one must consider how the political context that this movement has operated within will affect the outcomes of its advocacy (Orvis & Drogus, 2020, p. 229). When a state cannot easily alter its legislation, advocacy efforts are almost in vain (Orvis & Drogus, 2020, p. 229). For example, institutions such as the Mexican Congress are gendered institutions (Bolzendahl, 2014; De Barbieri, 2003; Lovenduski, 2005). This implies that state power has deeply entrenched gender hierarchies in which stereotypical masculine traits such as aggression and individualism are rewarded and feminine qualities of compassion and communal approaches are penalized (Brush, 2003). Essentially, this gendered institutional structure produces institutional resistance to the anti-femicide movement (Brush, 2003), as there is no priority given to female-associated issues such as gender violence. This is evident in the delegation of legislative oversight, in which committees in the Chamber of Deputies had a female majority to address the issue of femicide (García-Del Moral, 2020, p. 853). In contrast, the senate committees were male-dominated and did not take the issue of femicide as seriously (García-Del Moral, 2020, p. 854). As discussed earlier, activists, including female legislators, have directly accused the state of its complicity in order to place pressure on their government. Many see femicide as a state crime because of inaction and high rates of impunity. Nearly 30 years of inaction later, these sentiments are still held by protestors, as evident in messages such as “The Motherland Kills,” which was spray-painted in 2019 (Rios, 2022). The lack of meaningful institutional response to femicide prevents an end to the issue because of the limited political opportunity for activists to work within.
This gendered government structure manifests even in the presidency, as President Obrador has dismissed this movement. Pointing to his appointment of women to cabinet positions, he “has rejected claims by activists that he is not interested in tackling femicides, saying that progress has been made to defend women’s rights” (Reuters, 2022). Obrador has also claimed that there is conservative infiltration in the movement to undermine his administration, even though this has not been proven (Reuters, 2022). Furthermore, he has promised to overturn neoliberal policies, but this promise has not extended to social issues such as women’s rights (Agren, 2020). These statements are interesting in a historical context, as earlier leftist ideology in Latin America argued that action on women’s issues was not a necessity, as their liberation would prevail alongside that of the working class after the establishment of socialism (Escobar & Alvarez, 1992, p. 208). The sentiments expressed by President Obrador echo a similar message: that alleviating economic issues through overturning neoliberal policies should take precedence over issues faced by women. This dismissal from the president subsequently restricts the political opportunity structure for the anti-femicide movement. As President Obrador promises large reforms in other areas of society, he simultaneously rejects the need to push for progress on ending gender violence.

Anti-femicide activists have also witnessed their government prioritize government property over Mexican citizens, as barricades have been set up around the National Palace in Mexico City before large protests (Rios, 2022). Moreover, the police have unrightfully detained, sexually assaulted, and physically abused protestors without facing any accountability (Rios, 2022). The complicity in and perpetuation of assault by officers was a direct complaint from the anti-femicide movement. The fact that protestors are assaulted at protests demonstrates how they must address multiple institutions and put themselves in harm’s way while attempting to reimagine society.

Internally, there are divisions within the anti-femicide movements, especially along class lines between elite and working-class grassroots organizations (Starr, 2017, p. 1375). For example, even the ability to join protests against femicide is not a reality for some women, even if they support the movement. One woman, Juanita Hernandez, had to work as a street vendor while anti-femicide protests occurred across the city, citing the fact that taking a day off would bar her from accessing basic needs such as food for her and her children. She supported the movement personally, but financial barriers kept her from participating in demonstrations (Villegas, 2020). Both elite women, such as female legislators, and working-class women face barriers in their advocacy against femicide, but some elite women do not listen to the demands of the activists until they have been pressured, as evident in the mayor of Mexico City, Claudia Sheinbaum, who denounced the protestor demonstrations in 2020 because of the use of violence in the city (Villegas, 2020). As discussed earlier, it took a meeting with activist groups for Mayor Sheinbaum to recognize that there
needed to be a response to this issue, and without these meetings, any support from a woman in an elite role may have been withheld.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have analyzed the strategies and objectives of the anti-femicide movement in Mexico, and how social media and transnational activism have affected this movement. These activists have fought for recognition and legal protection in order to address how both culture and politics allow for gendered violence to occur at an unchecked rate. The rise of social media has allowed activists to spread their message beyond the mainstream media and to foster transnational solidarity. International actors, specifically the United Nations and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, have lent support to domestic activists, but the boomerang effect was not as strong as activists may have hoped for. Anti-femicide activists have faced barriers from gendered institutions to internal class divisions yet still have made strides in addressing the issue of femicide.

Femicide has been criminalized and codified, and the movement has not lost popularity after 30 years, even if there have been changes to its political strategies. Femicide is a pressing issue that requires fundamental changes to society and political institutions, which these activists understand and have centered in their activism. Although it may seem that this issue may never be solved, one cannot forget the impact of contentious politics and the power that the masses truly have. The bravery of these activists led to legislative changes and has challenged the dominant cultural view toward gendered violence. One day, femicide will become a dark part of history, rather than a terrifying reality.
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