

Short Title: Representation Behind Closed Doors

Representation Behind Closed Doors: The Effect of Electing Women Mayors on Domestic Violence

Maya Dalton*

Giancarlo Visconti†

June 1, 2026

Abstract

Extensive research shows that electing women improves public goods provision in areas like education and health, but less is known about their influence on private, yet socially consequential issues such as domestic violence. A key challenge in studying domestic violence is that increases in cases may reflect either a greater willingness to report or a rise in incidence. We address this using administrative data from Chile that distinguishes between citizen-reported and police-identified cases, the latter serving as a benchmark since the police operate independently of local governments. We find that citizen-initiated reports increase a few years after the election of a woman mayor, while police-identified cases remain unchanged. These patterns suggest that the increase reflects greater reporting and improved visibility of existing violence, with no evidence of a rise in incidence. Exploring mechanisms, we show that women mayors highlight gender-based violence in policy proposals and increase resources for community organizations.

Keywords: Representation, Domestic Violence, Gender, Local Governments, Chile

Supplementary material for this article is available in the appendix in the online edition.

Replication files are available in the JOP Data Archive on Dataverse (<https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataverse/jop>). The empirical analysis has been successfully replicated by the JOP replication analyst.

Funding statement: Giancarlo Visconti acknowledges funding from the National Fund for Scientific and Technological Development by the Millennium Nucleus Center for the Study of Politics, Public Opinion, and Media in Chile, MEPOP (grant number NCS2024_007).

*Ph.D. Candidate, Department of Political Science, Pennsylvania State University; mad6821@psu.edu.

†Assistant Professor, Department of Government and Politics, University of Maryland, College Park; gvis@umd.edu.

In recent decades, womens representation in elected office has expanded across the globe, prompting a growing body of research on how their presence shapes political behavior and policy outcomes. Much of this work has focused on highly visible areas such as education, health, and gender equality, showing that women leaders can influence these domains (Taylor-Robinson and Heath, 2003; Htun and Weldon, 2010). Far less is known, however, about whether and how women in office affect outcomes in less visible but deeply consequential areas that disproportionately affect women, such as domestic violence. Domestic violence, though often hidden from public view, is a social problem with wide-reaching public consequences. It includes physical, emotional, sexual, economic, and psychological abuse, and limits victims ability to fully engage in social, civic, and political life (Heise, 1998). Studying domestic violence also poses a methodological challenge: observed increases in reported cases may signal either more violence, greater willingness to report, or both.

In this paper, we examine whether electing women mayors affects domestic violence outcomes in Chile. We focus on whether womens leadership at the local level influences reporting behavior, one of the key obstacles to state intervention in domestic abuse cases. We argue that these effects occur through a combination of substantive representation, where women mayors prioritize policies related to womens issues, and constituency representation, where women voters and feminist networks amplify these efforts. These dynamics are particularly relevant in the Global South, where local governments often play a central role in service delivery and responsiveness to citizen needs (Escobar-Lemmon and Funk, 2017). This makes the municipal level a critical arena for examining gendered patterns in governance.¹

To assess the impact of electing women mayors on domestic violence, we use administrative data that distinguish between two types of reports: those initiated by citizens, typically the victim or a witness, and those independently identified by the police. Because Chiles national police force is institutionally independent of municipal governments, police-identified cases serve as a benchmark for actual incidence. By contrast, changes in citizen-initiated reports can reflect shifts

¹See Online Appendix A for a broader discussion of gender-based violence.

in reporting behavior or accessibility of services.

Using a staggered difference-in-differences (DiD) with dynamic (event-study) effects, we find that the election of a woman mayor results in a significant increase in citizen-initiated domestic violence reports, with no corresponding effect on police-identified cases. This pattern indicates that women are reporting more, with no evidence that the actual incidence of domestic violence is increasing. Importantly, the timing of these effects is relevant, as they are lagged and not permanent: reporting rises a few years after a woman is elected mayor and then fades within a decade. These results suggest that women's leadership can boost reporting in the medium term, but such gains might be difficult to sustain without deeper structural or cultural change.

We also explore potential mechanisms as to why this effect may occur. First, using municipal security plans, we find that women mayors devote greater attention to gender-based violence, reflecting substantive representation and potentially encouraging victims to come forward. Second, we examine spending on community organizations and show that electing women mayors increases both the number of such organizations and the resources they receive, consistent with constituency representation.

Additionally, we test whether the results reflect general improvements in governance rather than gendered leadership. Women mayors neither increase reports of other citizen-initiated crimes nor expand the number of security cameras or booths. These null findings support our interpretation that the rise in reporting is specific to women's substantive and constituency representation, rather than to general improvements in municipal security.

This study contributes to the gender and politics literature by examining strategies that may reduce violence against women (Arias, 2019; Green, Wilke and Cooper, 2020; Córdova and Kras, 2020; Lindsey, 2022; Amaral et al., 2023). We place particular emphasis on private domains, offering insights into the role of local leadership in addressing gendered violence.² At the same

² This complements a large body of research on how women's representation shapes political behavior and policies on women's issues. (e.g., Franceschet, Krook and Piscopo 2012; Barnes and Burchard 2013; Esarey and Schwindt-Bayer 2019; O'Brien and Reyes-Housholder 2020).

time, private issues that disproportionately affect women remain underrepresented in the literature, often due to challenges in measurement and data availability. By leveraging administrative data that captures these private dynamics, we highlight the importance of studying such phenomena in a broader global context.

Theoretical Framework

We build our theoretical framework on two related but distinct concepts: substantive representation and constituency representation. Substantive representation highlights how women leaders prioritize issues that disproportionately affect women, such as gender-based violence ([Wängnerud, 2009](#)). Constituency representation emphasizes the political incentives and networks that encourage women leaders to sustain these priorities, especially through ties with women voters and feminist organizations ([Reyes-Housholder, 2019](#)). The constituency theory helps explain why descriptive representation may translate into substantive representation in this context, explaining not only why women mayors are likely to act on issues like domestic violence, but also how those actions are reinforced and amplified.

A large body of scholarship demonstrates that women's political representation affects policy outcomes, particularly in areas that disproportionately affect women and marginalized communities. Research across diverse contexts shows that electing officials who share marginalized identities often mitigates policy bias and produces more inclusive outcomes. For example, studies in the United States have shown that policies affecting marginalized voters, such as women, racial minorities, and first-generation immigrants, become more equitable when representatives from these groups are elected ([Gay, 2002](#); [Weldon, 2002](#); [Zingher and Farrer, 2016](#); [Sances and You, 2017](#); [Kao et al., 2024](#)). When women are elected, they are more likely than men to prioritize issues such as reproductive rights, maternal health, and social welfare ([Bratton and Ray, 2002](#); [Taylor-Robinson and Heath, 2003](#); [Chattopadhyay and Duflo, 2004](#); [Schwindt-Bayer, 2006](#); [Childs, 2006](#); [Wängnerud, 2009](#); [Piscopo, 2014](#); [Funk and Philips, 2019](#); [Jiang and Zhou, 2022](#)). These studies

illustrate the logic of descriptive and substantive representation: women leaders are perceived and often act differently from men in terms of which issues they place on the agenda and the resources they devote to them.

Substantive representation is particularly important in the context of domestic violence, where survivors face severe barriers to seeking help. These include prioritizing the safety of children, financial dependence, or social and legal constraints surrounding separation from a spouse. Such barriers are especially pronounced in the Global South, where women face persistent gendered divisions of labor and disproportionate caregiving responsibilities that limit their autonomy and opportunities (Carreras, Vera and Visconti, 2023). While national hotlines such as the US National Domestic Violence Hotline or South Africa's Stop Gender Violence Hotline exist, many countries lack comparable nationwide services, and local communities often have limited access to support. Research shows that community-based educational programs, such as radio broadcasts or video demonstrations, can reduce violence against women and increase support for gender equality (Arias, 2019; Green, Wilke and Cooper, 2020). For example, evidence from Mexico indicates that women mayors can significantly reduce homicides of women by prioritizing efforts to combat gender-based violence (Alcocer, Skillman and Torres-Beltran, 2025). These examples illustrate how substantive representation can translate into concrete policy initiatives that lower barriers to reporting and protection.

Constituency representation complements this dynamic by linking together descriptive and substantive representation, highlighting the political incentives and networks that sustain such policies. Women mayors, in particular, can expand access to resources such as hotlines and safe houses, introduce school-based education programs, and promote bystander interventions to shift community norms. Beyond policymaking, they cultivate constituencies that incentivize and reinforce these actions (Reyes-Housholder, 2019). By framing violence prevention as a women's issue, women mayors mobilize women voters as a core constituency and form alliances with feminist organizations and grassroots activists. These networks provide expertise, legitimacy, and advocacy pressure, helping translate policy commitments into tangible initiatives and ensuring that efforts to

address domestic violence are effectively implemented.

Taken together, the presence of women in office (descriptive representation) may shape policy attention, responsiveness, or institutional behavior (substantive representation) precisely because women leaders may be more attentive to, or electorally responsive to, constituencies disproportionately affected by gender-based violence (constituency theory). This suggests that electing women mayors should increase reporting of domestic violence by both expanding survivors access to support and generating political incentives for proactive policy. Women mayors act substantively by prioritizing violence prevention and protection, while their constituencies of women voters and feminist networks sustain and amplify these efforts. Therefore, we argue that electing women mayors influences reporting of domestic violence by empowering survivors to come forward and by providing avenues for disclosure and support through policy initiatives and feminist networks.

The timing of when these effects take place is likely to vary. On the one hand, electing a woman mayor may generate immediate symbolic effects, as survivors could interpret the presence of a woman leader as a sign of institutional receptivity. Such symbolic representation can embolden survivors to report, producing an immediate increase. On the other hand, effects may emerge more gradually, as substantive policies, such as shelters or gender-sensitive school curricula, require time for design, funding, and implementation. These efforts may also depend on building trust with civil society organizations and feminist networks that extend their reach and legitimacy.

Regarding the persistence of effects, they may either stabilize or fade. Once reporting pathways are institutionalized and survivors gain confidence in consistent state responsiveness, reporting levels may remain elevated over time as a reflection of lasting changes in reporting behavior. However, these gains may not be permanent and could diminish without deeper cultural transformation or in the presence of antifeminist backlash. Therefore, it is the layering of institutional and cultural effects that ultimately determines whether women's leadership yields long-term transformations in domestic violence reporting.

Gender, Policing, and Violence in Chile

In 2006, Chile elected a woman as president for the first time. Michelle Bachelet served from 2006 to 2010 and again from 2014 to 2018, covering much of our period of analysis (2005 to 2020). Her Social Protection Agenda contributed to the institutionalization of gender policy and may have shaped the environment in which women mayors pursued their priorities (Waylen, 2016).³ Beyond the presidency, electoral reforms in 2002 had gendered effects (Hinojosa and Franceschet, 2012) and subsequent reforms, including the 2020 Constitutional Assembly quota, produced notable gains in women's representation (Reyes-Houholder and Roque, 2019; Suarez-Cao, 2021; Piscopo et al., 2023; Reyes-Houholder, Suárez-Cao and Arce-Riffo, 2024). Yet these improvements have been less evident at the local level: women remain underrepresented in mayoral posts (Holman, 2017; Alberti, Díaz-Rioseco and Visconti, 2022).⁴ This is not unique to Chile; women are often underrepresented in local executives across Latin America (Escobar-Lemmon and Funk, 2017), in part because candidate nomination processes are controlled by men, who are generally less attentive to reducing gender gaps (Hinojosa and Franceschet, 2012).

Despite this underrepresentation, women who do reach the mayoral office have been especially active in combating gender-based violence in Chile (Franceschet, 2010). For example, Mayor Claudia Pizarro of La Pintana has led a campaign against domestic violence that includes the "Woman Alert" program, which delivers GPS devices with a panic button to users. If threatened, a person can press the button, allowing responders to locate them (Cooperativa, 2020). Similarly, Mayor Carolina Leitaó of Peñalolén has overseen the "SOS Women Program," which equips users with a panic button that tracks their location and connects them to an operator for real-time assis-

³While Bachelet's presidency marked an important moment for the politicization of gender issues nationally, we find no systematic correlation between her time in office and the number of women mayors.

⁴Additionally, there is no formal gender quota requirement for mayoral candidates. While political parties may voluntarily promote gender balance among their slate of local executives, there is no legal mechanism mandating this.

tance ([Alfaro, 2021](#)). At the national level, Chile also witnessed a wave of feminist mobilization during 2019-2020 ([de Fina Gonzalez, 2021](#)). These protests underscore the growing salience of gender violence in Chilean political discourse; however, because they occurred at the very end of our observation window, they are unlikely to explain the broader reporting patterns we observe.

Understanding how women mayors influence reporting also requires recognizing the institutional limits of their authority over policing. A key feature of the Chilean case for our research design is that mayors do not control the police, making police-identified cases a useful benchmark. The Carabineros (the national police) are a centralized institution that operates autonomously from municipal governments. Although they are formally under the authority of the Ministry of Interior, even the central government cannot manipulate police deployment at the municipal level. The police themselves determine the number of officers required in each municipality ([Alberti, Díaz-Rioseco and Visconti, 2023](#)). This autonomy largely reflects institutional reforms introduced during Pinochet's dictatorship ([Frühling, 2012](#)).

If the Ministry of Interior has little control over Carabineros, then local governments have even less capacity to influence their actions. Municipalities have assumed an increasingly visible role in public security, but without actual authority over policing. This creates a tension: local governments are expected by citizens to address crime and insecurity, yet they lack the ability to command or restructure police institutions ([Dammert, 2004](#)). Moreover, because Chile has no subnational or municipal police, the protocols for detecting and classifying domestic violence are uniform and nationally standardized. These institutional features mean that police-identified cases are largely insulated from mayoral influence. Even when local authorities request additional policing in certain areas, the Carabineros make the final decisions. Simply put, women mayors do not have a direct path to affect police-identified domestic violence cases, making these a good benchmark for actual cases. By contrast, they could influence citizen-reported cases through substantive and constituency representation.

To see why our outcomes capture both incidence and reporting behavior, it is important to understand how domestic violence is legally defined and classified in Chile. The classification of

an incident as domestic violence (*violencia intrafamiliar* or VIF) is determined by Carabineros, either at the moment a complaint is filed or when they directly detect a case. The framework guiding this process is established by the Law on Domestic Violence (Law No. 20,066, enacted in 2005), together with Carabineros operational protocols ([Carrasco Navarro, 2021](#)). According to these guidelines, domestic violence against women includes multiple forms of abuse within legally recognized family or intimate relationships and encompasses physical, psychological, sexual, and economic violence.⁵ It is important to note, however, that not all acts of violence against women fall within the scope of domestic violence. When aggression occurs between individuals without a legally recognized family or intimate link, such as neighbors, coworkers, or acquaintances, the case is classified under the general Penal Code, most often as assault or threats.

Finally, Chile offers a uniquely valuable context for our study because it sits between developed and developing contexts. On the one hand, Chile stands out within Latin America for its consolidated democratic institutions, strong state capacity, and reliable administrative records, placing it closer to advanced democracies where institutional weakness is less salient ([OECD, 2018](#)). On the other hand, the country continues to grapple with challenges typical of developing contexts, including persistent inequality and uneven provision of local public goods ([UNDP, 2017](#)). This dual positioning, ahead of much of the Global South but still behind high-income democracies, makes Chile an ideal bridge case. It allows us to investigate domestic violence reporting in a setting where institutional weakness is not the primary barrier, while still capturing the social and structural constraints that remain central in many developing societies. Importantly, being a bridge case increases the broader relevance of our findings: the effects of women mayors on citizens will-

⁵Law No. 20,066 and Carabineros protocols specify that domestic violence applies when the victim and aggressor share a legally recognized relationship. This includes spouses, civil partners, cohabitants, partners of a sentimental or sexual nature without cohabitation, and the father of a son or daughter in common. When a complaint is filed, the officer must first determine whether this qualifying relationship exists. If so, the case is officially recorded as domestic violence ([Carrasco Navarro, 2021](#)).

ingness to report domestic violence is likely to extend to other democracies where local executives campaign on women's issues and engage directly with citizens in providing basic services.

Research Design

To estimate the effect of electing a woman mayor on domestic violence, we address two methodological challenges. First, women mayors are not randomly assigned. Municipalities that elect women may differ from those that do not in observed and unobserved ways. While adjusting for observable characteristics can reduce some bias, unobserved factors may still confound results. To address this, we employ a difference-in-differences (DiD) design, which identifies causal effects under the assumption that treated and control municipalities would follow parallel trends in the absence of treatment.

Because municipalities elect women mayors at different points in time, we use a staggered DiD and estimate event-study (dynamic) treatment effects ([Callaway and Sant'Anna, 2021](#)). This design aggregates effects over the length of treatment exposure, facilitating the interpretation of results. We focus on ten pre- and post-treatment periods, which allows us to evaluate parallel trends a decade before treatment and track how effects evolve over time. We collected electoral data from four municipal elections (2005–2020) and used candidates' self-reported gender to identify women mayors.⁶

Therefore, our design defines treatment as the first election of a woman mayor, compares treated municipalities with those that never elect a woman, and accounts for staggered timing. As

⁶ In a staggered DiD design, once a municipality is treated, it remains treated. Thus, when a municipality elects a man after previously electing a woman, we drop those municipality years to maintain the staggered structure (though the municipality is retained in previous years). Municipalities that have continuously had a woman mayor since 2005 are excluded because they lack pretreatment observations (see Online Appendix B). As a robustness check, in Online Appendix C, we also retain municipalities that switch from a woman mayor back to a man mayor. As expected, this contaminates and attenuates the estimated effect, given the inclusion of men mayors.

an additional robustness test, we complement this analysis with a regression discontinuity design in close elections (Online Appendix D).

The second challenge concerns measurement. An observed increase in domestic violence can be interpreted in two ways. It may indicate that more acts of violence are occurring in a given municipality-year, or it may reflect greater willingness by survivors to report incidents. To distinguish between these possibilities, we leverage detailed administrative data from Chile, where domestic violence cases are classified into two categories: (1) cases reported to the police by a survivor or witness, for example, when a woman calls the police and asks for food, used as a code for domestic violence (Prieto, 2022); and (2) cases identified independently by the police, for example, during a national police round resulting in multiple detentions for domestic violence (Carvajal, 2023). These two indicators allow us to assess whether an increase in recorded cases reflects greater reporting or a higher incidence of violence.

Police data provide a particularly useful benchmark or placebo test because, as discussed in the previous section, Chile's police force is autonomous from local governments. Consequently, even if mayors request that police focus more attention on certain crimes, the police are not obligated to comply. Moreover, because of protocols derived from the 2005 domestic violence law, cases are processed uniformly by the police across the country. As a supplementary check, we examine whether women mayors are associated with changes in common offenses using the same DiD framework as our main analysis. We also examine two measures of municipal security infrastructure (security cameras and booths), which are available only beginning in 2016, and therefore, we analyze them descriptively.

In summary, the structure of our dataset is as follows: the unit of analysis is the municipality-year. For each observation, we identify its treatment status (woman mayor or not) and the length of treatment (number of years with a woman mayor). The outcomes are domestic violence against women reported by citizens and domestic violence against women identified by the police (both standardized). We also include relevant pretreatment covariates (e.g., local development indicators, population, and vote share) in the DiD design.

Before presenting the regression framework, it is useful to visualize the distribution of women mayors across the country. Using data from 2005 to 2020, Figure 1 shows municipalities that have had a woman mayor in red and those that have never had a woman mayor in blue. Women mayors are distributed across the country rather than concentrated in one region.

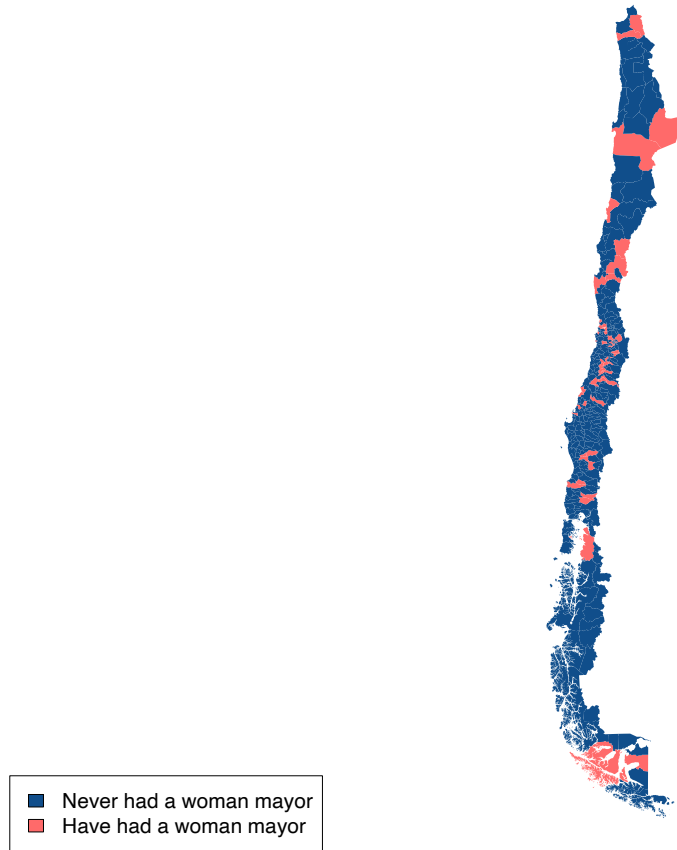


Figure 1: Map of Chile showing municipalities by mayoral gender history, 2005-2020. Red: municipalities that elected a woman mayor at least once; blue: municipalities that never elected a woman mayor.

Alt text: Map of Chile displaying all municipalities color-coded by whether they have ever elected a woman mayor between 2005 and 2020. Municipalities that elected a woman mayor at least once are shown in red, while those that never elected a woman mayor are shown in blue. Red municipalities are distributed throughout the country rather than concentrated in any single region.

To estimate the causal effect, we implement the difference-in-differences estimator proposed by [Callaway and Sant'Anna \(2021\)](#). Let G_i denote the first year in which municipality i elected a

woman mayor, with $G_i = \infty$ for municipalities that never elect a woman mayor (i.e., never-treated). The building block of this approach is the group-time average treatment effect:

$$ATT(g, t) = \mathbb{E}[Y_{it}(g) - Y_{it}(\infty) \mid G_i = g] \quad (1)$$

which captures the average effect at year t for municipalities first treated in year g , relative to the never-treated group. We estimate $ATT(g, t)$ using a doubly-robust approach that conditions on pretreatment covariates X_i : local development indices (2003), population (2002), and presidential vote share (1999 and 2005). We use bootstrap standard errors clustered at the municipality level.

We then aggregate the group-time effects into event-study (dynamic) coefficients by length of exposure $e = t - g$, which gives the average effect e years after a municipality first elects a woman mayor. The overall ATT reported in the figures averages these event-study (dynamic) coefficients across post-treatment periods.⁷

Results

Main Effects

We implement the difference-in-differences estimator proposed by [Callaway and Sant'Anna \(2021\)](#) and present the results in an event-study format. This approach estimates treatment effects based on the duration of exposure, up to ten years after a municipality first elected a woman mayor. Some municipalities never elected a woman mayor, which allows us to construct a control group for comparison. This empirical strategy directly evaluates our core theoretical claim: if increased representation enhances institutional responsiveness to women's concerns, then electing a woman mayor should alter citizens' engagement with local institutions. Moreover, because our argument centers on reporting behavior rather than underlying crime incidence, we expect effects to emerge

⁷As an additional robustness check, in Online Appendix E, we report [Sun and Abraham \(2021\)](#) event-study estimates, which closely mirror our main dynamic results.

specifically in citizen-initiated reports and not necessarily in police-identified cases.

Figure 2 presents the main results of electing a woman mayor on domestic violence rates against women: (a) cases reported by citizens and (b) cases identified by the police. The grey markers represent the pre-treatment period. The absence of statistically significant effects for either outcome during this period supports the parallel trends assumption (i.e., treated and control municipalities followed similar trajectories prior to treatment). In other words, the pre-treatment coefficients (event times < 0) are statistically indistinguishable from zero and show no systematic pattern before the election of a woman mayor.⁸ The black markers represent the post-treatment period, reflecting the estimated effects of electing a woman mayor over time.

We also report the overall post-treatment effect with its 95% confidence interval inside a box. This overall average treatment effect is our main piece of evidence, as it provides a stable and interpretable summary of the impact. The dynamic effects illustrate how the impact of electing a woman mayor evolves across years of exposure, allowing us to assess not only whether representation matters, but whether its influence builds gradually, stabilizes, or fades, as our theory of institutional responsiveness would suggest.

⁸In Online Appendix F, we provide additional diagnostics: (i) a global joint test that all pre-treatment event-time coefficients equal zero for each main outcome and (ii) pre-treatment covariate balance comparisons between treated and never-treated municipalities.

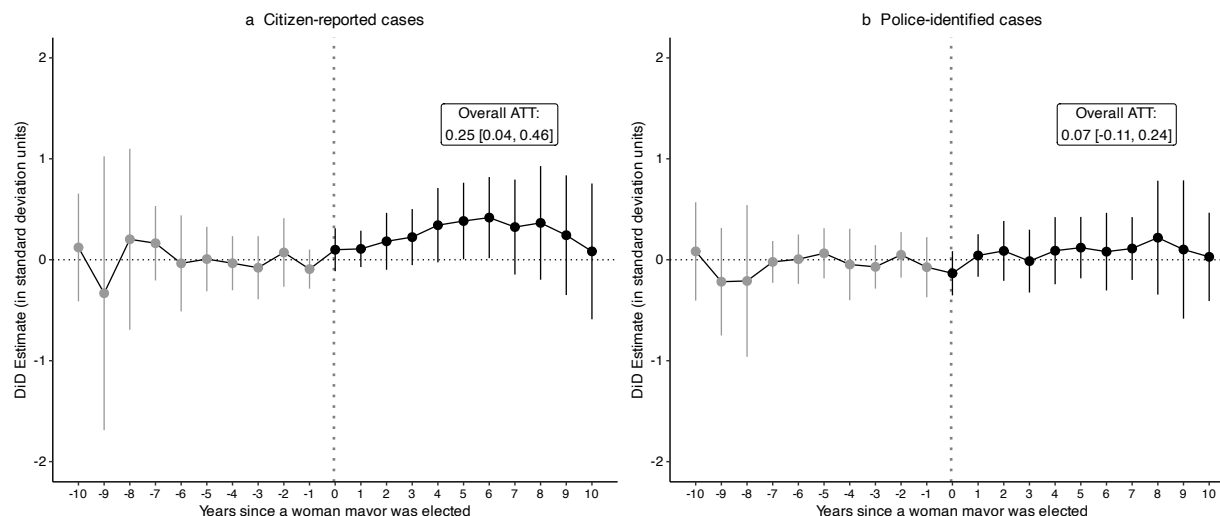


Figure 2: Average effect of having a woman mayor on violence against women by length of exposure. A length of exposure of -1 refers to the year before the first exposure, 0 to the first exposure, and 1 to the second exposure. The overall treatment effect and 95% confidence intervals are reported. $N = 5,042$ municipality-year observations.

Alt text: Two event-study plots side by side showing difference-in-differences estimates of the effect of electing a woman mayor on domestic violence outcomes, from ten years before to ten years after the first election of a woman mayor. Panel (a) shows citizen-reported cases, with pre-treatment coefficients close to zero and post-treatment coefficients rising and becoming statistically significant around year five before declining toward zero by year ten; the overall average treatment effect is 0.25 standard deviations with a 95 percent confidence interval of 0.04 to 0.46. Panel (b) shows police-identified cases, with coefficients close to zero throughout both the pre- and post-treatment periods and no statistically significant effects at any time; the overall average treatment effect is 0.07 standard deviations with a 95 percent confidence interval of -0.11 to 0.24.

When examining domestic violence reported by citizens (Figure 2a), the average of the post-treatment coefficients indicates that a woman mayor has a positive effect on reports. On average, women mayors increase the number of domestic violence reports by 0.25 standard deviation units (95% CI: [0.04, 0.46]). This represents an increase of about 51 reports per 100,000 people in a given municipality-year. Consistent with our argument that womens leadership enhances survivors willingness to engage with local institutions, this effect appears in citizen-initiated reporting behavior rather than in administrative detection.

When disaggregating by length of exposure, Figure 2a shows a statistically significant effect

five years after the first election (95% CI: [0.00, 0.76]). This delayed peak is consistent with a representation-based mechanism that operates through policy prioritization, signaling, and constituency mobilization, all of which require time to generate institutional trust and awareness. The impact diminishes over time, vanishing after ten years when the point estimate approaches zero (95% CI: [-0.59, 0.76]). This pattern aligns with our expectation that gains in reporting may erode if reforms are not continuously reinforced or embedded in bigger structural change. Detailed results are provided in Online Appendix G.⁹

For domestic violence cases identified by the police (Figure 2b), the average of the post-treatment coefficients shows no evidence that women mayors affect this outcome. The results indicate a small, non-significant increase of 0.07 standard deviation units. When disaggregated by exposure length, Figure 2b shows no instance in which the election of a woman mayor has a significant effect. The absence of effects on police-identified cases strengthens our interpretation: women's representation appears to alter citizens' engagement with institutions rather than the underlying incidence of violence itself.

To further validate our findings, we also implement a regression discontinuity design (RDD) in closely contested elections (Online Appendix D). The conclusions align with those from the DiD analysis: we observe a significant increase in citizen-reported cases but no significant effect on police-identified cases. The convergence of results across identification strategies reinforces the coherence of our representation-based explanation and supports the broader claim that women's executive leadership shapes how institutions are perceived and used by survivors.

⁹In Chile, mayoral terms last four years. Effects observed beyond this period usually reflect reelection, which accounts for most cases of municipalities with more than four consecutive years of women's leadership. Term limits were first applied in the 2021 elections, so during all of our study period, reelection was possible and common. In 2016, 83.8% of incumbents ran for reelection, of whom 72.7% were successful (Cádiz, 2016).

Persistence of Effects

As shown in Figure 2, the positive effects of women mayors on reporting are not permanent. Reports of domestic violence rise about five years after a woman is elected, but the impact disappears after roughly a decade. This temporal pattern is substantively important for our broader argument. If women's substantive representation and constituency effects enhance institutional responsiveness, then we should expect effects to build gradually as policies are implemented and trust is cultivated. At the same time, if these changes are not embedded in deeper structural transformations, their influence may weaken over time. Why, then, do these effects diminish?

Two plausible explanations stand out. First, municipalities led by men may have caught up following a highly salient national discussion on domestic violence in 2010, which culminated in Congress passing a femicide law (Vásquez Mejías, 2015). If this is the case, the initial responsiveness associated with women's leadership may have diffused more broadly across municipalities, reducing differences over time. Second, policies that facilitate reporting may fail to address the deeper structural dynamics of violence against women, and thus have only limited durability (Franceschet, 2010). Because gender-based violence is rooted in longstanding cultural and religious norms (Merry, 2009), policy interventions may generate medium-term improvements but lose force unless reinforced by deeper structural or cultural transformations. The persistence of effects, therefore, depends on whether substantive and constituency representation is translated into more enduring institutional and normative change.

To assess these explanations, we divide the citizen-reported sample based on the first year of having a woman mayor (i.e., 2009, 2013, and 2017), which allows us to examine whether patterns differ across cohorts (supporting the first expectation of contextual catch-up) or remain similar across cohorts (supporting the second expectation rooted in structural limits). Importantly, the dynamic estimates at later years should be interpreted with caution because sample sizes are smaller in this part of the analysis. As a result, confidence intervals widen, and estimates become less precise. Thus, results based on the length of exposure for subgroups are useful for examining

trajectories but should be interpreted in light of reduced statistical power.

Figure 3 shows consistent patterns across the subgroups. First, effects are not immediate for any of the three groups, reinforcing our earlier finding that representation operates through gradual processes rather than instant change. Second, the increases appear after a few years for the groups with available data (those first treated in 2009 and 2013), consistent with the idea that institutional signaling, policy prioritization, and constituency mobilization require time to translate into reporting behavior. As mentioned above, the wider confidence level reflects the increase in uncertainty resulting from smaller sample sizes when the data are partitioned into multiple groups. Finally, effects disappear for the group first treated in 2009 and begin to decline in the last period for the group first treated in 2013.

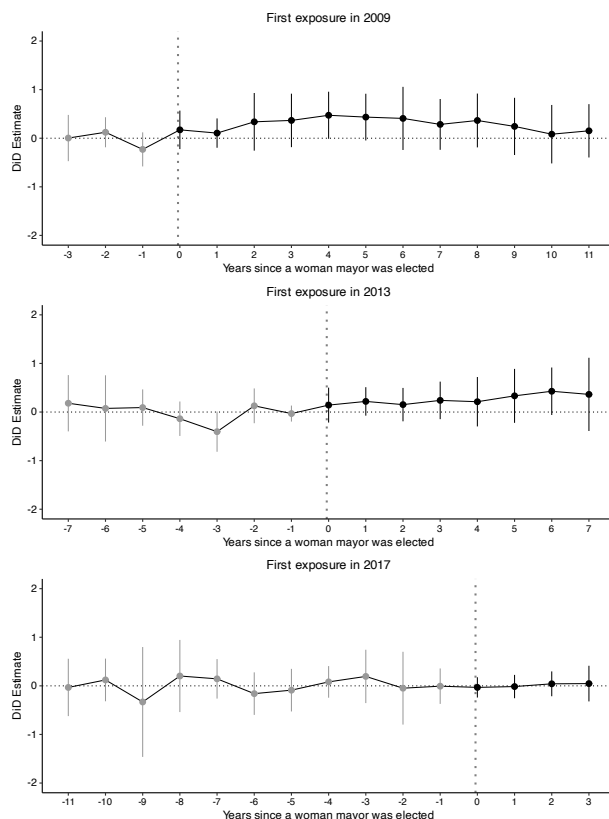


Figure 3: Average effect of having a woman mayor on citizen-reported violence against women by length of exposure and by group (first exposure in 2009, 2013, and 2017). A length of exposure of -1 refers to the period before the first exposure, 0 to the first exposure, and 1 to the second exposure. $N = 4,361$; 4,333; and 4,240 municipality-year observations, respectively.

Alt text: Three stacked event-study plots showing difference-in-differences estimates of the effect of electing a woman mayor on citizen-reported domestic violence cases, separated by the cohort of first exposure. The top panel shows municipalities first treated in 2009, with effects emerging gradually a few years after treatment, peaking in the middle of the post-treatment window, and fading by year ten. The middle panel shows municipalities first treated in 2013, with effects emerging gradually a few years after treatment and beginning to decline in the final periods. The bottom panel shows municipalities first treated in 2017, with effects close to zero throughout the limited post-treatment window. Confidence intervals are wider in the cohort-specific plots due to smaller sample sizes.

The similarity across cohorts suggests that the length of exposure, rather than specific contextual events, explains the observed pattern: the effects take a few years to appear, emerge at the beginning of the second term of a woman mayor, and fade roughly ten years after the first exposure. In theoretical terms, this pattern aligns more closely with the structural explanation. It suggests

that womens substantive representation can enhance institutional responsiveness in the medium term, but that without broader transformation of gendered norms and institutional practices, those gains are difficult to sustain. The fading of effects, therefore, reflects the limits of representation alone in reshaping deeply embedded social dynamics.

An alternative explanation is antifeminist backlash. Chile has witnessed visible mobilization around gender issues in recent years, including the politicization of feminist demands during the 2019 social uprising and pushback from conservative actors ([Miranda Leibe, 2023](#)), which is consistent with broader patterns in which crises can undermine progress toward gender equality ([Forester and O'Brien, 2020](#)). Such dynamics may reinforce or accelerate the erosion of earlier gains. However, given that this phenomenon is more recent, our data do not allow us to test the effect of antifeminist backlash.¹⁰

In short, our findings indicate that the positive effects of women mayors on reporting tend to fade with time in office. Interpreted through our broader framework, this suggests that women's representation can improve institutional accessibility and engagement in the medium term, but that sustaining these gains likely requires deeper and more durable structural change. While contextual factors may contribute to this decline, the similarity across exposure cohorts suggests that the challenge lies not only in specific events or laws but also in sustaining long-term changes in gendered norms and reporting behavior. Future research should examine whether and how the long-term effects of womens leadership can be consolidated.

¹⁰Another possible explanation for the decrease in reports is that incidents of domestic violence are actually declining, making victims less likely to report. However, since we do not observe any change in police-identified cases, this explanation lacks empirical support.

Mechanisms

Security Plans

A possible mechanism linking the election of women mayors to domestic violence reporting is substantive representation, namely, the prioritization of womens issues and policies. Our broader theoretical argument posits that descriptive representation enhances institutional responsiveness by shaping policy priorities (e.g., substantive representation) and signaling to constituents that their concerns are recognized. If this mechanism is at work, we should observe evidence that women mayors more explicitly incorporate gender-based violence into official policy documents. Such prioritization constitutes one observable channel through which representation may translate into greater institutional accessibility and, ultimately, higher reporting.

To analyze this, we collected security plans from 91 Chilean municipalities spanning 2011 to 2025. Security plans are official documents summarizing each municipalitys main goals and strategies regarding public security. Online Appendix H details the processing of these plans, including the list of municipality-years included and the variations of keywords analyzed. At both stages, we counted the frequency of the following keywords: *woman/women*, *gender*, *domestic violence*, *gender violence*, and *femicide/s*. The final dataset includes each municipalitys name, the year of the plan, the number of pages, a count of keyword occurrences, and the gender of the mayor for that year.

Our main outcome for this analysis is the total number of relevant keywords mentioned in each plan. As a robustness check, we divided the total number of mentions by the number of pages, creating a weighted outcome. To evaluate whether having a woman mayor influences the frequency of these mentions, we estimate the following linear regression model with province fixed effects:

$$Y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{WomenMayor}_i + \mathbf{X}_i' \beta_2 + \gamma_r + \varepsilon_i \quad (2)$$

where Y_i is the outcome for unit i (total mentions or mentions per page), $WomenMayor_i$ is a binary indicator for whether the mayor is a woman, $\mathbf{X}_i$ is a matrix of pretreatment covariates (local development indicators, population, and vote share), γ_r are province fixed effects, and ε_i is the error term. The coefficient of interest is β_1 .

Table 1: Regression results for security plans

	Keywords	Keywords per page
Women mayor	33.41* (14.33)	0.66* (0.29)
Controls	Yes	Yes
Province Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes
Observations	109	109

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.05$.

The results indicate that security plans under women mayors contain, on average, 33 more references to gender-related issues, or 0.66 additional mentions per page, compared to plans under male mayors. Substantively, this pattern is consistent with our representation-based account: women mayors are more likely to prioritize gender-based violence within formal policy agendas. By embedding these issues in official security planning, women leaders may signal institutional commitment, mobilize supportive constituencies, and create clearer pathways for engagement.

Community Organizations

To further evaluate our argument that combines substantive and constituency representation, we analyze the effect of electing a woman mayor on spending directed toward community organizations. In our broader framework, descriptive representation enhances institutional responsiveness not only through formal policy prioritization but also through the activation and strengthening of intermediary actors that connect citizens to the state. Community organizations are particularly important in this regard, as they can function as trusted bridges between survivors and formal institutions. If women mayors increase reporting by making institutions more accessible and responsive,

one pathway should operate through greater investment in these community-based networks.

From a substantive representation perspective, women mayors are expected to prioritize resources that directly address women's needs, including expanding support for organizations that provide services or alternative avenues for survivors of domestic violence. From a constituency representation perspective, women mayors are incentivized to respond to women voters and feminist networks, which often pressure local governments to fund grassroots organizations that support survivors and amplify women's voices. These organizations may lower informational, social, or psychological barriers to reporting. For instance, women mayors might prioritize funding for mothers groups or neighborhood associations, which can function as alternative reporting mechanisms or referral channels outside traditional police structures.

Figure 4 presents evidence for this mechanism, using municipal spending on community organizations and the number of community organizations as outcome variables.¹¹

¹¹While there are different types of community organizations in Chile, a relevant share of them work directly on gender-related issues, such as women's associations and grassroots groups working to end violence against women. Other organizations, although not centered exclusively on gender issues, can also play an important role in facilitating reporting and support for survivors, such as neighborhood associations and parents associations. See [Irrázaval and Streeter \(2020\)](#) for an overview of community organizations in Chile.

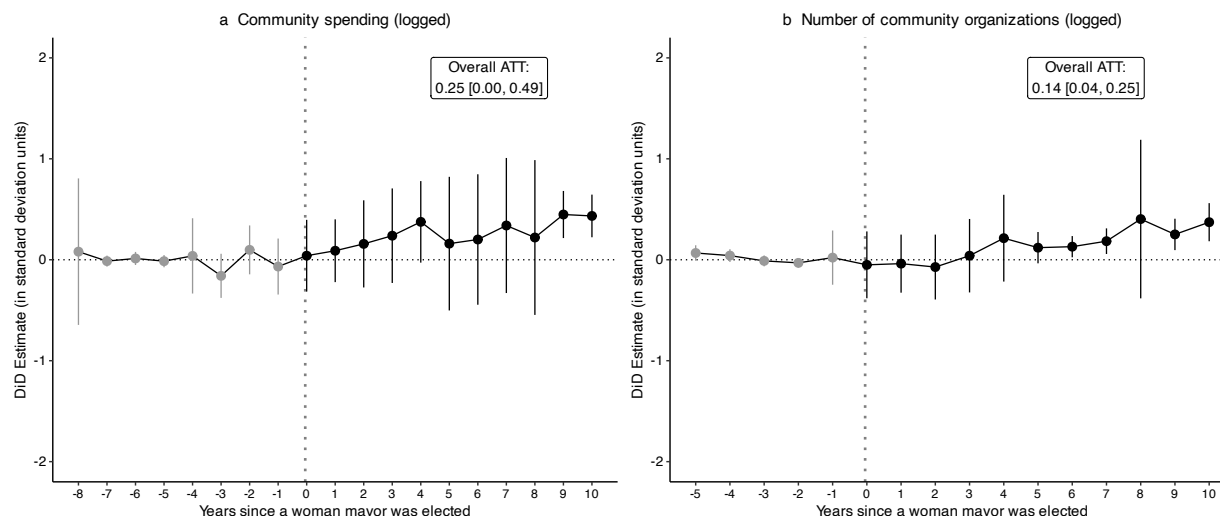


Figure 4: Average effect of having a woman mayor on community organizations. Panel (a) shows spending on community organizations; panel (b) shows the number of community organizations. A length of exposure of -1 refers to the period before the first exposure, 0 to the first exposure, and 1 to the second exposure. The overall treatment effect and 95% confidence intervals are reported. $N = 5,042$ municipality-year observations.

Alt text: Two event-study plots side by side showing difference-in-differences estimates of the effect of electing a woman mayor on community organization outcomes. Panel (a) shows logged spending on community organizations, with pre-treatment coefficients close to zero and post-treatment coefficients gradually rising and remaining positive over time; the overall average treatment effect is 0.25 standard deviations with a 95 percent confidence interval of 0.00 to 0.49. Panel (b) shows the logged number of community organizations, with pre-treatment coefficients close to zero and post-treatment coefficients rising gradually and persisting at positive values; the overall average treatment effect is 0.14 standard deviations with a 95 percent confidence interval of 0.04 to 0.25. Both panels indicate that effects build over time and persist throughout the post-treatment window.

The results show a positive and significant effect of electing women mayors on both outcomes, indicating that womens leadership increases community spending (95% CI: [0.003, 0.49]) and the number of community organizations (95% CI: [0.04, 0.25]). The findings suggest that women mayors progressively invest more in community organizations, and that after a few years, these investments translate into a greater number of organizations. This pattern makes sense, as creating and consolidating organizations takes time. Interestingly, these effects persist over time, providing additional evidence that the fading effects on domestic violence reporting are driven by the

persistence of social norms and the lack of deeper cultural change.

Alternative Explanations: Security Outcomes

An alternative explanation for substantive and constituency representation is that women mayors are better at providing and enhancing security, leading to a general increase in reports of other offenses that affect citizens quality of life. Women mayors might improve reporting avenues broadly, resulting in more complaints about different types of crimes. To test this possibility, we examine two common offenses in Chile that are typically reported by citizens: public intoxication and disturbing the peace. If women mayors enhance communication between citizens and the government, we would expect to see increases in reports of these offenses.

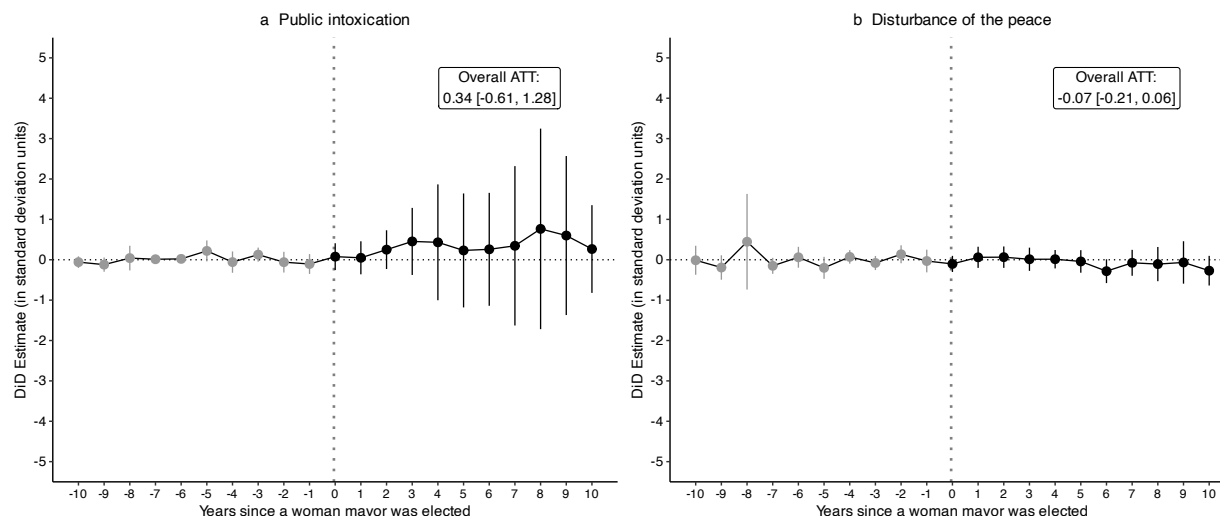


Figure 5: Average effect of having a woman mayor on citizen-reported alternative offenses. A length of exposure of -1 refers to the period before the first exposure, 0 to the first exposure, and 1 to the second exposure. The overall treatment effect and 95% confidence intervals are reported. $N = 5,042$ municipality-year observations.

Alt text: Two event-study plots side by side showing difference-in-differences estimates of the effect of electing a woman mayor on alternative citizen-reported offenses. Panel (a) shows public intoxication, with coefficients close to zero across both pre- and post-treatment periods and no statistically significant effects; the overall average treatment effect is 0.34 standard deviations with a 95 percent confidence interval of -0.61 to 1.28. Panel (b) shows disturbance of the peace, with coefficients close to zero across both pre- and post-treatment periods and no statistically significant effects; the overall average treatment effect is -0.07 standard deviations with a 95 percent confidence interval of -0.21 to 0.06. Neither panel shows evidence that women mayors affect reporting of these alternative offenses.

Figure 5 presents the results. We do not find evidence that women mayors produce either overall or dynamic effects on these offenses. This pattern indicates that the increase in reporting is specific to violence that disproportionately affects women, rather than a general improvement in how citizens report crime. That specificity is what our argument predicts: women's representation operates through the prioritization of gendered issues and engagement with women's constituencies. A general administrative improvement would have raised reporting of public intoxication and disturbances as well, and it did not.

We also investigate whether women mayors enhance the security performance of municipalities, which could have two possible implications. First, improved security might explain changes in

reporting. Second, and more importantly, it could influence our primary outcome: police-identified cases. In other words, if women mayors improve security measures, our benchmark would no longer serve as a baseline but instead become another outcome of electing women mayors. To examine this possibility, we test the impact of electing a woman mayor on two security-related outcomes: the number of security cameras and the number of security booths. These variables are available starting in 2016, which means we lack information on pre-treatment trends and can only observe one mayoral term. Therefore, we cannot implement our main DiD design. Consequently, we use the same province fixed-effects specification employed for the analysis of security plans, but with different outcome variables. The outcomes are logged and standardized to facilitate interpretation and comparability. We treat this analysis as descriptive; even after conditioning on baseline political and socioeconomic covariates and including province fixed effects, the estimates may still be subject to omitted-variable bias.

Table 2: Regression results for security outcomes

	Security cameras (logged)	Security booths (logged)
Women mayor	−0.02 (0.10)	−0.02 (0.13)
Controls	Yes	Yes
Province Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes
Observations	1,725	1,725

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.05$.

Table 2 shows no association between electing a woman mayor and the number of security cameras or booths. Given the limited time coverage of these measures, we interpret this result as suggestive and consistent with the view that our main findings are not driven by broad investments in security infrastructure. This further reinforces our interpretation that police-identified cases remain a valid benchmark, since women mayors do not appear to influence policing capacity or infrastructure.

Conclusion

Prior research has shown that women in office often behave differently from men, especially in national legislatures, but there is less evidence on whether and how these differences manifest in local governance. This gap is notable given that local governments play a crucial role in service delivery, particularly in areas related to safety, welfare, and social support. Among these, domestic violence remains as one of the most socially harmful problems, affecting millions of women worldwide. Importantly, although domestic violence typically occurs in private settings, it has profound social consequences, shaping victims ability to engage in public life. In this context, this paper seeks to provide a better understanding of how gender dynamics influence local responses to domestic violence.

Using administrative data from Chile, this study addresses this gap by examining whether electing women mayors affects reports of domestic violence against women. While most prior work has focused on broad rates of violence against women, we distinguish between citizen-initiated and police-identified cases, which allows us to separate reporting behavior from crime incidence. Applying a difference-in-differences design, we find that women mayors positively influence domestic violence reporting, with significant increases occurring around the fifth and sixth years in office. Importantly, we do not find evidence that women mayors affect cases identified by the police. These findings suggest that survivors are more willing to report incidents under womens leadership, with no evidence that actual crime rates change.

Electing a woman mayor may influence domestic violence reports through different mechanisms, but we focus on the role of substantive representation and the constituency theory. Women leaders often prioritize public policies addressing womens issues, while their constituencies – women voters and feminist networks – sustain, amplify, and monitor these efforts. These policies can include public security measures such as domestic violence hotlines, safehouses, and educational programming (e.g., media campaigns or community-wide initiatives). In the context of domestic violence, we find evidence that women mayors prioritize women’s issues in their

security plans and direct more spending to community organizations (e.g., their constituencies), creating accessible resources and avenues for reporting.

We also find that these effects are not immediate, tend to peak after several years, and then diminish over time. This temporal pattern suggests that reforms lose strength unless they are accompanied by deeper structural or cultural transformations. Because gender-based violence is rooted in slow-moving cultural and social norms, interventions that increase reporting may only have medium-range effects when not sustained by broader institutional or cultural change. Moreover, antifeminist backlash and political resistance may further erode the durability of reforms, as recent mobilizations in Chile have shown.

The core implication of our findings concerns representation and institutional responsiveness. If women's presence in executive office increases reporting of gender-based violence, then political representation can shape whether survivors feel able and safe to engage with public institutions. What this points toward is a setting in which those institutions are accessible, trusted, and responsive to the people most affected by domestic violence. Therefore, our findings speak to the value of gender parity and inclusive representation (rather than advocating for exclusive female leadership). The rise in reporting is not simply a downstream effect of descriptive representation, but a sign that institutions have become more accessible.

Future research should examine whether women's leadership influences the types of cases reported by using detailed incident-level data. Such data would allow scholars to assess whether women mayors primarily uncover less severe but previously hidden forms of abuse or also affect the reporting of more severe cases. This evidence would offer a clearer understanding of how women's leadership shapes reporting behavior and interacts with the underlying dynamics of domestic violence. Further comparative work is also needed to explore why effects appear to diminish over time and how they might be sustained through institutional or cultural entrenchment. Incorporating the impact of women mayors on violence against women will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of both the causes and the consequences of women's political representation.

Acknowledgments

We thank Isabella Alcañiz, Carolina Batista, Alexandra Blackman, Cecilia Cavero, Dorothy Kronick, Isabel Laterzo-Tingley, Jaime Lindh, Charles Seguin, four anonymous reviewers at the Journal of Politics, and seminar participants at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Penn State, Maryland, APSA 2023, and MWEPS 2024 for helpful comments and suggestions. Soledad Araya provided excellent research assistance. All errors are our own.

References

- Alberti, Carla, Diego Díaz-Rioseco and Giancarlo Visconti. 2022. “Gendered bureaucracies: Women mayors and the size and composition of local governments.” *Governance* 35(3):757–776.
- Alberti, Carla, Diego Díaz-Rioseco and Giancarlo Visconti. 2023. “Can political alignment reduce crime? Evidence from Chile.” *Political science research and methods* 11(2):223–236.
- Alcocer, Marco, Rachel Skillman and Angie Torres-Beltran. 2025. “Female mayors and violence against women: evidence from Mexico.” *Political Science Research and Methods* pp. 1–8.
- Alfaro, Hector. 2021. “Autoridades de la Región Metropolitana visitaron el programa “SOS Mujer” que busca prevenir la Violencia Intrafamiliar.” *CNN Chile*.
URL: <https://www.cnnchile.com/pais/autoridades-visitaron-programa-sos-mujer-busca-prevenir-violencia-intrafamiliar/>
- Amaral, Sofia, Gordon B. Dahl, Victoria Endl-Geyer, Timo Hener and Helmut Rainer. 2023. *Deterrance or Backlash? Arrests and the Dynamics of Domestic Violence*. Working Paper 30855 National Bureau of Economic Research Cambridge, MA: .
- Arias, Eric. 2019. “How Does Media Influence Social Norms? Experimental Evidence on the Role of Common Knowledge.” *Political Science Research and Methods* 7(3):561–578.

- Barnes, Tiffany D. and Stephanie M. Burchard. 2013. “Engendering Politics: The Impact of Descriptive Representation on Womens Political Engagement in Sub-Saharan Africa.” *Comparative Political Studies* 46(7):767–790.
- Bratton, Kathleen A. and Leonard P. Ray. 2002. “Descriptive Representation, Policy Outcomes, and Municipal Day-Care Coverage in Norway.” *American Journal of Political Science* 46(2):428–437.
- Cádiz, Pablo. 2016. “Récord en reelección de alcaldes: ¿consecuencia de la nueva ley electoral?” *T13*.
URL: <https://www.t13.cl/noticia/politica/record-en-reeleccion-de-alcaldes-consecuencia-de-la-nueva-ley-electoral>
- Callaway, Brantly and Pedro HC SantAnna. 2021. “Difference-in-differences with multiple time periods.” *Journal of econometrics* 225(2):200–230.
- Carrasco Navarro, Camila Belén. 2021. “Sistema cautelar en violencia intrafamiliar.” *Universidad Diego Portales, Santiago, Chile*.
- Carreras, Miguel, Sofia Vera and Giancarlo Visconti. 2023. “Who does the caring? Gender disparities in COVID-19 attitudes and behaviors.” *Politics & Gender* 19(1):5–33.
- Carvajal, Shelmmy. 2023. ““Ronda Intersectorial Focalizada”: procedimiento policial dejó 729 detenidos a nivel nacional.” *La Tercera*.
URL: <https://www.latercera.com/nacional/noticia/ronda-intersectorial-focalizada-procedimiento-policial-dejo-729-detenedos-a-nivel-nacional/2SHKV73AGVEITI7756GQ5TWPY4/>
- Chattopadhyay, Raghabendra and Esther Duflo. 2004. “Women as Policy Makers: Evidence from a Randomized Policy Experiment in India.” *Econometrica* 72(5):1409–1443.

- Childs, Sarah. 2006. "The Complicated Relationship between Sex, Gender and the Substantive Representation of Women." *European Journal of Women's Studies* 13(1):7–21.
- Cooperativa. 2020. "La Pintana entregará dispositivo con GPS a víctimas de violencia intrafamiliar." *Cooperativa.cl*.
URL: <https://www.cooperativa.cl/noticias/pais/policial/violencia-intrafamiliar/la-pintana-entregara-dispositivo-con-gps-a-victimas-de-violencia/2020-07-28/225703.html>
- Córdova, Abby and Helen Kras. 2020. "Addressing Violence Against Women: The Effect of Womens Police Stations on Police Legitimacy." *Comparative Political Studies* 53(5):775–808.
- Dammert, Lucía. 2004. "Seguridad ciudadana: experiencias y desafíos." *Santiago*.
- de Fina Gonzalez, Débora. 2021. "'A Rapist in Your Path': Feminist Activism in the Chilean Social Revolt." *Feminist Studies* 47(3):594–598.
- Esarey, Justin and Leslie A. Schwindt-Bayer. 2019. "Estimating Causal Relationships Between Womens Representation in Government and Corruption." *Comparative Political Studies* 52(11):1713–1741.
- Escobar-Lemmon, Maria C. and Kendall D. Funk. 2017. Womens Representation in Subnational Government: Replicating National Institutions or Forging a Unique Path. In *Gender and Representation in Latin America*, ed. Leslie A. Schwindt-Bayer. Oxford University Press pp. 99–119.
- Forester, Summer and Cheryl O'Brien. 2020. "Antidemocratic and exclusionary practices: COVID-19 and the continuum of violence." *Politics & Gender* 16(4):1150–1157.
- Franceschet, Susan. 2010. "Explaining Domestic Violence Policy Outcomes in Chile and Argentina." *Latin American Politics and Society* 52(3):1–29.
- Franceschet, Susan, Mona Lena Krook and Jennifer M. Piscopo. 2012. *The Impact of Gender Quotas*. Oxford University Press.

- Frühling, Hugo. 2012. "A realistic look at Latin American community policing programmes." *Policing and society* 22(1):76–88.
- Funk, Kendall D. and Andrew Q. Philips. 2019. "Representative Budgeting: Women Mayors and the Composition of Spending in Local Governments." *Political Research Quarterly* 72(1):19–33.
- Gay, Claudine. 2002. "Spirals of Trust? The Effect of Descriptive Representation on the Relationship between Citizens and Their Government." *American Journal of Political Science* 46(4):717–732.
- Green, Donald P., Anna M. Wilke and Jasper Cooper. 2020. "Countering Violence Against Women by Encouraging Disclosure: A Mass Media Experiment in Rural Uganda." *Comparative Political Studies* 53(14):2283–2320.
- Heise, Lori L. 1998. "Violence against women: An integrated, ecological framework." *Violence against women* 4(3):262–290.
- Hinojosa, Magda and Susan Franceschet. 2012. "Separate but not equal: The effects of municipal electoral reform on female representation in Chile." *Political Research Quarterly* 65(4):758–770.
- Holman, Mirya R. 2017. "Women in Local Government: What We Know and Where We Go from Here." *State and Local Government Review* 49(4):285–296.
- Htun, Mala and S Laurel Weldon. 2010. "When do governments promote women's rights? A framework for the comparative analysis of sex equality policy." *Perspectives on Politics* 8(1):207–216.
- Irrarrázaval, Ignacio and Paula Streeter. 2020. "Mapa de las organizaciones de la sociedad civil 2020." *Santiago, Chile: Centro de Políticas Públicas UC, Fundación Chile+ Hoy*.

- Jiang, Xinhui and Yunyun Zhou. 2022. “Coalition-Based Gender Lobbying: Revisiting Women’s Substantive Representation in China’s Authoritarian Governance.” *Politics & Gender* 18(4):978–1010.
- Kao, Kristen, Ellen Lust, Marwa Shalaby and Chagai M Weiss. 2024. “Female representation and legitimacy: Evidence from a harmonized experiment in Jordan, Morocco, and Tunisia.” *American Political Science Review* 118(1):495–503.
- Lindsey, Summer. 2022. “Conflict, Protection, and Punishment: Repercussions of Violence in Eastern DR Congo.” *American Journal of Political Science* 66(1):187–204.
- Merry, Sally Engle. 2009. *Human rights & gender violence: Translating international law into local justice*. University of Chicago Press.
- Miranda Leibe, Lucia. 2023. Chiles feminist spring: Impasse and continuity of womens demands for a life free of sexism. In *Womens Rights in Movement: Dynamics of Feminist Change in Latin America and the Caribbean*. Springer pp. 67–87.
- OECD. 2018. *Government at a Glance: Latin America and the Caribbean 2017*. Paris: OECD Publishing.
- OBrien, Diana Z and Catherine Reyes-Housholder. 2020. “Women and executive politics.” *The Oxford Handbook of Political Executives* .
- Piscopo, Jennifer M. 2014. “Beyond Hearth and Home: Female Legislators, Feminist Policy, and Substantive Representation in Mexico.” *Revista Uruguaya de Ciencia Política* 23(spe):87–110.
- Piscopo, Jennifer M., Gwynn Thomas, Peter Siavelis and Magda Hinojosa. 2023. “Lessons from a Late Adopter: Feminist Advocacy, Democratizing Reforms, and Gender Quotas in Chile.” *Journal of Politics in Latin America* .
- Prieto, M. Francisca. 2022. “Mujer llamó a Carabineros pidiendo empanadas para denunciar que era víctima de violencia intrafamiliar.” *Emol*.

URL: <https://www.emol.com/noticias/Nacional/2022/07/26/1067989/mujer-violencia-intrafamiliar-carabineros-empanadas.html>

- Reyes-Housholder, Catherine. 2019. "A constituency theory for the conditional impact of female presidents." *Comparative Politics* 51(3):429–449.
- Reyes-Housholder, Catherine and Beatriz Roque. 2019. "Chile 2018: desafíos al poder de género desde la calle hasta La Moneda." *Revista de ciencia política (Santiago)* 39(2):191–216.
- Reyes-Housholder, Catherine, Julieta Suárez-Cao and Javiera Arce-Riffo. 2024. "The Puzzle of Chiles Resilient Support for Gender Parity." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 57(2):263–266.
- Sances, Michael W. and Hye Young You. 2017. "Who Pays for Government? Descriptive Representation and Exploitative Revenue Sources." *The Journal of Politics* 79(3):1090–1094.
- Schwindt-Bayer, Leslie A. 2006. "Still Supermadres? Gender and the Policy Priorities of Latin American Legislators." *American Journal of Political Science* 50(3):570–585.
- Suarez-Cao, Julieta. 2021. "Reconstructing legitimacy after crisis: The Chilean path to a new constitution." *Hague Journal on the Rule of Law* 13:253–264.
- Sun, Liyang and Sarah Abraham. 2021. "Estimating dynamic treatment effects in event studies with heterogeneous treatment effects." *Journal of econometrics* 225(2):175–199.
- Taylor-Robinson, Michelle M. and Roseanna Michelle Heath. 2003. "Do Women Legislators Have Different Policy Priorities than Their Male Colleagues?" *Women & Politics* 24(4):77–101.
- UNDP. 2017. *Desiguales: Orígenes, cambios y desafíos de la brecha social en Chile*. Santiago: PNUD Chile.
- Vásquez Mejías, Ainhoa Montserrat. 2015. "Feminicidio en Chile, más que un problema de clasificación." *URVIO, Revista Latinoamericana de Estudios de Seguridad* (17):36–47.

Wängnerud, Lena. 2009. "Women in parliaments: Descriptive and substantive representation." *Annual Review of Political Science* 12(1):51–69.

Waylen, Georgina. 2016. *Gender, Institutions, and Change in Bachelet's Chile*. Studies of the Americas New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Weldon, S. Laurel. 2002. *Protest, Policy, and the Problem of Violence against Women: A Cross-National Comparison*. University of Pittsburgh Press.

Zingher, Joshua N and Benjamin Farrer. 2016. "The electoral effects of the descriptive representation of ethnic minority groups in Australia and the UK." *Party Politics* 22(6):691–704.

Biographical Statements

Maya Dalton is a Ph.D. Candidate in the Department of Political Science and Social Data Analytics at Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA 16802.

Giancarlo Visconti is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Government and Politics at the University of Maryland, College Park, MD 20742.

Supplementary Appendix:
**Representation Behind Closed Doors: The Effect of
Electing Women Mayors on Domestic Violence**

Maya Dalton* Giancarlo Visconti†

June 1, 2026

Contents

A	Understanding Gender-Based Violence	1
B	Research Design	2
C	Treatment Leavers	3
D	Regression Discontinuity Design	4
E	Sun & Abraham Event Study	6
F	Global Pre-Trends and Covariate Balance	8
G	Main Results in Table Format	9
H	More Details about the Security Plans	11

*Ph.D candidate, Department of Political Science, Pennsylvania State University; mad6821@psu.edu.
†Assistant Professor, Department of Government and Politics, University of Maryland, College Park;
gvis@umd.edu

A Understanding Gender-Based Violence

On average, nearly 20 people per minute are physically abused by an intimate partner in the United States. Over the course of a year, this equates to more than 10 million women and men (NCADV, 2023). In Chile, one in four women who have been in a relationship report experiencing some form of partner violence in the past 12 months, whether psychological, physical, sexual, or economic (Saavedra, Contreras Urbina and Inchauste, 2022). More recently, the COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically increased rates of domestic violence worldwide, as lockdown measures gave abusers greater freedom to act without being reported. For instance, domestic abuse rates increased by 5% in Australia, tripled in China, and rose by 20–30% in the United States (Mittal and Singh, 2020). In Chile, research has found that lockdown measures led to an increase in domestic violence helpline calls and shelter occupancy (Bhalotra et al., 2024).

Studies have shown that low-income, minority ethnic, and racialized women are among the most disadvantaged and vulnerable to interpersonal violence, as they are often subjected to violent social structures (Hearn et al., 2016). Increasingly, the intersections of gender with other forms of inequality, such as age, disability, and education, are crucial to consider when examining instances of gender-based violence. Additionally, external circumstances within communities can exacerbate gender-based violence, such as elections, armed conflict, and economic crises (Agbalajobi, 2016; Kishi, 2021; Lindsey, 2022). In the context of armed conflict, for example, domestic violence is often punished less severely than other forms of violence, such as rape (Lindsey, 2022). Moreover, survivors of such violent acts frequently face societal stigmatization and repercussions rather than receiving support (Koos and Lindsey, 2022). Women and their families may lose trust in the government and security forces, such as police officers. This stigmatization, combined with a lack of resources, significantly impacts women's physical, emotional, financial, and even political lives.

B Research Design

Figure A1 summarizes the treatment across units and time. Each row represents a municipality; red spaces indicate a woman mayor, while blue spaces indicate a man mayor. Importantly, we exclude (i) municipality-years where a man was elected after a woman (i.e., not a staggered treatment) and (ii) municipalities that elected a woman mayor in the first year of the dataset (i.e., always treated). This figure shows the final structure of the staggered treatment used to implement the difference-in-differences approach, where 304 municipality-years have a woman serving as mayor and 4,425 municipality-years have a man serving as mayor. This figure excludes municipalities that have had a woman mayor since 2005 (always treated), which is why these counts differ from the estimation sample reported in Figure 2.

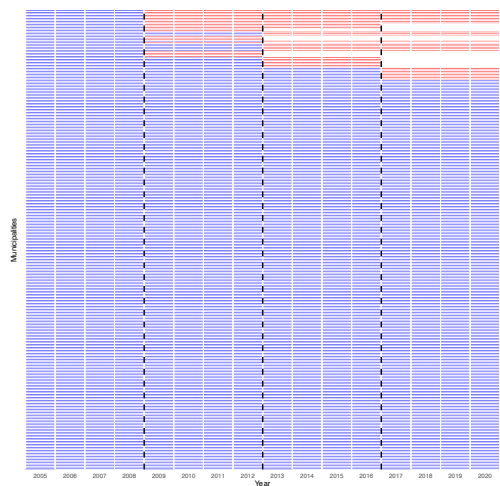


Figure A1: Women mayors across municipalities and years. Red indicates municipalities with women mayors, blue indicates municipalities with men mayors, and white indicates cases where a man was elected after a woman.

C Treatment Leavers

Our baseline difference-in-differences implementation follows [Callaway and Sant’Anna \(2021\)](#), which assumes that once a municipality is treated it remains treated. To maintain consistency with this staggered-adoption framework, the main analysis drops municipality-years in which a municipality elects a man mayor after having previously elected a woman mayor (i.e., “treatment leavers”). This restriction avoids violating the no-treatment-reversal assumption embedded in the estimator.

As a robustness check, we relax this restriction and retain municipalities that transition from a woman mayor back to a man mayor, including man-woman-man sequences. Because the estimator is designed for settings without treatment reversals, retaining leavers implies that some municipality-years led by a man are mechanically classified as treated under the “once treated, always treated” definition. We therefore interpret this exercise as a conservative attenuation/contamination check: including leavers should bias estimates toward zero and can also reduce precision.

Consistent with this expectation, when treatment leavers are retained the overall ATT for citizen-reported domestic violence is substantially smaller than in the baseline analysis. Specifically, the overall ATT is approximately 0.09 standard deviations (compared to 0.25 in the baseline specification that excludes leavers) and is no longer statistically distinguishable from zero (95% CI: [-0.24, 0.41]).

D Regression Discontinuity Design

As an alternative empirical strategy, we employ a regression discontinuity design (RDD) in close electoral races, comparing municipalities where a woman narrowly wins over a man to those where a man narrowly wins over a woman. In this RDD setup, the unit of analysis is the municipality-year. Each municipality has a score based on the margin in the previous local election, and treatment is assigned if the score exceeds a particular cutoff. The treatment is defined as having a woman mayor (with a man as the runner-up), while the control is defined as having a man mayor (with a woman as the runner-up). The score represents the vote share difference between women and men candidates (the margin of victory). The cutoff is set at zero; thus, when the score is positive, the winning candidate is a woman, and when the score is negative, the winning candidate is a man. It is important to note that RDD estimates the effect of electing women at the cutoff, meaning the results are local in nature and apply to closely contested races.

We use the same time frame as the main analysis in the manuscript (2005 to 2020). To estimate the effects of electing a woman, we use local linear regressions, relying on an MSE-optimal bandwidth and a triangular kernel. The following estimation equation is used for this analysis, which is an extension of the one used to analyze security plans.

$$Y_{it} = \alpha + \beta_1 T_{it} + \beta_2 M_{it} + \beta_3 (T_{it} \times M_{it}) + \mathbf{X}_i' \beta_4 + \gamma_r + \varepsilon_{it} \quad (1)$$

Y is domestic violence in municipality i and year t . T depicts the treatment (units above the cutoff). M describes the margin of victory. The interaction between T and M allows the regression function to differ on both sides of the cutoff point. $\mathbf{X}_i$ is a matrix of relevant pre-treatment characteristics (i.e., local development indicators, population, and vote share), γ_r represents province fixed effects, and ε_i is the error term. The coefficient of interest is β_1 (i.e., the effect of electing a woman mayor at the cutoff).

Table A1 shows the results using the previous equation, which allows us to observe the effect of electing a woman mayor (at the cutoff) on domestic violence. Only coefficient β_1 is reported.

Table A1: Regression discontinuity results

	<i>Domestic Violence</i>	
	Reported by citizens	Found by the police
	(1)	(2)
Woman mayor	0.51* (0.15)	0.08 (0.15)
MSE Bandwidth	0.11	0.13
Observations	504	608

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.05$.

The conclusions align with those from the difference-in-differences analysis. On the one hand, we observe a significant increase of 0.51 standard deviation units in reports made by citizens. On the other hand, we do not find evidence of a significant impact in cases found by the police. Importantly, the RDD estimates the impact of electing a woman mayor at the cutoff and only for competitive elections.

E Sun & Abraham Event Study

This section reports an event-study robustness check using the estimator proposed by [Sun and Abraham \(2021\)](#), which is designed for staggered-adoption settings with potentially heterogeneous treatment effects. This approach provides an additional benchmark to assess whether our main dynamic patterns are sensitive to the choice of estimator.

As background, our main analysis uses the [Callaway and Sant’Anna \(2021\)](#) estimator, which was developed to address the biases that can arise in staggered-adoption settings under a naive two-way fixed effects (TWFE) specification when treatment effects are heterogeneous ([De Chaisemartin and d’Haultfoeuille, 2020](#)). Unlike TWFE, this approach constructs cohort-by-time comparisons using not-yet-treated municipalities as controls and aggregates them without relying on comparisons that can generate negative weights.

To illustrate the empirical relevance of the negative-weights concern in our setting, we implement the diagnostic procedure proposed by [De Chaisemartin and d’Haultfoeuille \(2020\)](#) for a naive TWFE specification. The results indicate that negative weights would be substantial: 24.71% of municipality–year cells receive negative weights under TWFE. As a result, using an approach such as those proposed by [Callaway and Sant’Anna \(2021\)](#) or by [Sun and Abraham \(2021\)](#) becomes critical for addressing the negative weights problem.

Figure [A2](#) presents the [Sun and Abraham \(2021\)](#) event-study estimates. The dynamic patterns closely mirror those obtained using [Callaway and Sant’Anna \(2021\)](#). In the case of citizen-reported cases, we see an effect that appears after a few years and then vanishes. In the case of police-identified cases, we find no evidence of an effect at any time.

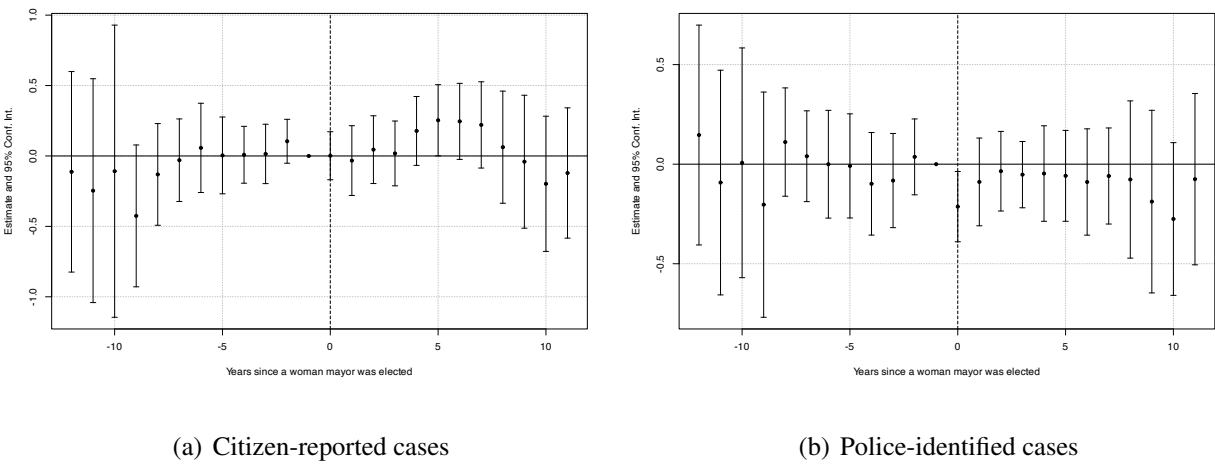


Figure A2: Average effect of electing a woman mayor on violence against women by length of exposure (Sun & Abraham event-study estimates)

F Global Pre-Trends and Covariate Balance

In this section we provide two complementary diagnostics for the parallel trends assumption. First, we report a global pre-treatment test for both main outcomes: (1) citizen-reported cases and (2) police-identified cases. Table A2 reports Wald tests of the null hypothesis that all pre-treatment event-time coefficients (leads) equal zero (lead window: -10 to -1). We do not reject the null for either outcome.

Table A2: Global pre-treatment (lead) Wald tests

Outcome	χ^2	df	<i>p</i> -value
Citizen-reported cases	3.35	9	0.95
Police-identified cases	3.85	9	0.92

Second, we compute difference-in-means tests between municipalities that eventually elect a woman mayor (treated) and never-treated municipalities, restricting the sample to pre-treatment periods only. Table A3 reports group means, differences, and two-sided *t*-tests. The results provide evidence supporting covariate balance across the five pretreatment covariates included in the difference-in-differences model.

Table A3: Pre-treatment covariate balance (difference-in-means)

Covariate	Mean (Treated)	Mean (Control)	Diff.	SE	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Population (2002)	60696.11	42354.00	18342.10	15771.08	1.16	0.25
Income index (2003)	0.59	0.60	-0.01	0.02	-0.29	0.77
Bachelet vote share (2005)	0.46	0.46	-0.00	0.01	-0.07	0.94
Lagos vote share (1999)	0.44	0.46	-0.02	0.02	-0.99	0.33
Education index (2003)	0.67	0.69	-0.02	0.02	-0.63	0.53

G Main Results in Table Format

Table A4: Figure 2a - Reported by citizens

Event Time	Estimate	Std. Error	[95% Simult. Conf. Band]
-10	0.1218	0.2043	[-0.4112, 0.6547]
-9	-0.3317	0.5199	[-1.6882, 1.0249]
-8	0.2028	0.3436	[-0.6937, 1.0993]
-7	0.1638	0.1413	[-0.2048, 0.5324]
-6	-0.0358	0.1822	[-0.5113, 0.4396]
-5	0.0070	0.1223	[-0.3120, 0.3260]
-4	-0.0345	0.1026	[-0.3023, 0.2333]
-3	-0.0788	0.1198	[-0.3915, 0.2339]
-2	0.0720	0.1300	[-0.2671, 0.4111]
-1	-0.0926	0.0742	[-0.2862, 0.1010]
0	0.0994	0.0815	[-0.1134, 0.3121]
1	0.1078	0.0690	[-0.0722, 0.2878]
2	0.1826	0.1079	[-0.0991, 0.4643]
3	0.2242	0.1064	[-0.0536, 0.5020]
4	0.3424	0.1411	[-0.0258, 0.7105]
5	0.3838	0.1453	[0.0047, 0.7628]
6	0.4177	0.1539	[0.0162, 0.8193]
7	0.3238	0.1803	[-0.1466, 0.7942]
8	0.3652	0.2157	[-0.1976, 0.9280]
9	0.2432	0.2271	[-0.3495, 0.8359]
10	0.0829	0.2577	[-0.5895, 0.7553]

Table A5: Figure 2b - Found by the police

Event Time	Estimate	Std. Error	[95% Simult. Conf. Band]
-10	0.0828	0.1795	[-0.4044, 0.5699]
-9	-0.2175	0.1961	[-0.7498, 0.3148]
-8	-0.2100	0.2768	[-0.9613, 0.5413]
-7	-0.0214	0.0763	[-0.2285, 0.1857]
-6	0.0055	0.0900	[-0.2389, 0.2499]
-5	0.0639	0.0915	[-0.1845, 0.3123]
-4	-0.0469	0.1303	[-0.4007, 0.3068]
-3	-0.0703	0.0793	[-0.2855, 0.1450]
-2	0.0487	0.0830	[-0.1766, 0.2740]
-1	-0.0733	0.1098	[-0.3713, 0.2247]
0	-0.1342	0.0807	[-0.3532, 0.0848]
1	0.0423	0.0775	[-0.1682, 0.2528]
2	0.0878	0.1092	[-0.2087, 0.3842]
3	-0.0134	0.1146	[-0.3244, 0.2977]
4	0.0897	0.1224	[-0.2426, 0.4221]
5	0.1200	0.1121	[-0.1842, 0.4243]
6	0.0803	0.1415	[-0.3039, 0.4646]
7	0.1113	0.1146	[-0.1998, 0.4224]
8	0.2187	0.2078	[-0.3453, 0.7827]
9	0.1014	0.2523	[-0.5835, 0.7863]
10	0.0288	0.1610	[-0.4083, 0.4660]

H More Details about the Security Plans

Municipality security plans were processed in two stages using Python. First, the *pypdf* package¹ was used to clean for stop words, tokenize, and export into a bag-of-words data frame. Some files could not be processed this way due to being scanned images, so the second stage utilized Python OCR. Python OCR is a technology that extracts text from images, such as scanned documents and photos.² This process was completed using the open-source OCR engine Tesseract. Security files that could not be processed in the first stage were treated as images and processed through OCR, resulting in another bag-of-words data frame.

Table A6 shows the keywords of interest for this analysis. The most common mentions are “mujeres” or “women”, closely followed by the singular of this keyword and “intrafamiliar”. The “vif” keyword refers to intrafamiliar violence, which is also common across the documents.

Table A6: Keyword Mentions in Security Plans

Keyword	Mentions
femicides (femicidios)	5
femicide (femicidio)	6
intrafamiliar (intrafamiliar)	799
woman (mujer)	856
vif (vif)	628
gender (genero)	7
women (mujeres)	851
violence (violencia)	125

Table A7 lists the municipalities and years for security reports from 91 Chilean municipalities spanning 2011 to 2025.³

¹ For documentation on usage, see <https://github.com/py-pdf/pypdf>.

² For documentation on this process, see <https://builtin.com/data-science/python-ocr>.

³ Actual observations are 109 because of missing values in the covariates for one municipality.

Table A7: Security Plans for Municipality-Years

Municipality	Years	Municipality	Years	Municipality	Years
Alto Del Carmen	2018, 2019, 2020	Melipilla	2019	Quinta De Tilcoco	2022
Ancud	2022	Molina	2022	Quintero	2022
Antofagasta	2022	Mulchen	2021, 2022	Rancagua	2016
Arica	2021, 2024	Nueva Imperial	2017, 2021	Recoleta	2020
Buin	2019	Nunoa	2016, 2017	Renca	2017
Cabo De Hornos	2017	Osorno	2016	Rengo	2022
Cabrero	2023	Ovalle	2022	Rinconada	2023
Calbuco	2018	Padre Hurtado	2022	Saavedra	2017
Castro	2020	Padre Las Casas	2023	San Antonio	2015, 2021
Cerro Navia	2022	Paillaco	2022	San Fabian	2023
Chillan	2022	Paredones	2018	San Fernando	2022
Cholchol	2019	Parral	2011	San Javier	2022
Chonchi	2017, 2023	Pelluhue	2022	San Joaquin	2022
Colina	2021, 2022	Penaflo	2022	San Miguel	2021
Collipulli	2022	Penalolen	2022	San Pedro De Atacama	2021
Conchali	2017, 2022	Pichilemu	2017, 2022	Santiago	2019, 2023
Coquimbo	2022	Pitrufquen	2021	Sierra Gorda	2019, 2023
Coyhaique	2022	Providencia	2021, 2023	Talca	2022
Curepto	2022	Pucon	2019	Talcahuano	2015
El Tabo	2022, 2025	Puente Alto	2022, 2023	Temuco	2022
Freirina	2017	Puerto Montt	2023	Teno	2022
Futaleufu	2022	Puerto Varas	2022	Teodoro Schmidt	2022
Huechuraba	2022	Purranque	2016	Tocopilla	2023
Iquique	2020	Putando	2023	Tucapel	2017
La Cruz	2022	Quilicura	2022	Valdivia	2022, 2023
La Florida	2022			Valparaiso	2017
La Pintana	2020			Vichuquen	2022
La Reina	2017			Victoria	2023
Lautaro	2023			Villa Alegre	2021, 2023
Limache	2023			Villa Alemana	2022
Los Alamos	2018			Vina Del Mar	2022
Los Angeles	2017, 2021				
Los Lagos	2023				
Los Vilos	2017				
Mejillones	2023				

References

- Agbalajobi, Damilola Taiye. 2016. “Electoral violence and women’s participation in electoral processes: challenges and prospects for future elections in Nigeria.” *Unilag Sociological Review (USR)* XII:73–94.
- Bhalotra, Sonia, Emilia Brito, Damian Clarke, Pilar Larroulet and Francisco Pino. 2024. “Dynamic Impacts of Lockdown on Domestic Violence: Evidence from Multiple Policy Shifts in Chile.” *The Review of Economics and Statistics* pp. 1–29.
- Callaway, Brantly and Pedro HC Sant’Anna. 2021. “Difference-in-differences with multiple time periods.” *Journal of econometrics* 225(2):200–230.
- De Chaisemartin, Clément and Xavier d’Haultfoeuille. 2020. “Two-way fixed effects estimators with heterogeneous treatment effects.” *American Economic Review* 110(9):2964–96.
- Hearn, Jeff, Sofia Strid, Liisa Husu and Mieke Verloo. 2016. “Interrogating violence against women and state violence policy: Gendered intersectionalities and the quality of policy in The Netherlands, Sweden and the UK.” *Current Sociology* 64(4):551–567.
- Kishi, Roudabeh. 2021. “Violence Targeting Women in Politics: Trends in Targets, Types, and Perpetrators of Political Violence.”
- Koos, Carlo and Summer Lindsey. 2022. “Wartime Sexual Violence, Social Stigmatization and Humanitarian Aid: Survey Evidence from eastern Democratic Republic of Congo.” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 66(6):1037–1065.
- Lindsey, Summer. 2022. “Conflict, Protection, and Punishment: Repercussions of Violence in Eastern DR Congo.” *American Journal of Political Science* 66(1):187–204.
- Mittal, Shalini and Tushar Singh. 2020. “Gender-Based Violence During COVID-19 Pandemic: A Mini-Review.” *Frontiers in Global Women’s Health* 1.

NCADV. 2023. “National Statistics.” National Coalition Against Domestic Violence.

Saavedra, Trinidad, Manuel Contreras Urbina and Gabriela Inchauste. 2022. “Intimate Partner Violence against Women: Prevalence, Formal Reporting, and Risk Factors in Chile.”

Sun, Liyang and Sarah Abraham. 2021. “Estimating dynamic treatment effects in event studies with heterogeneous treatment effects.” *Journal of econometrics* 225(2):175–199.