



*Boletín Colaborativo Amassuru - GENSAC-
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Arms and Gender: Shifting Narratives and The Power of Perspective

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Organizan:



When we talk about firearms, the narrative often follows a well-trodden path. It's a conversation dominated by statistics, policy debates, and a pervasive image of violence—one in which women are predominantly cast as victims. But what if we shifted the focus? What if we considered the nuanced, often overlooked roles that women play in relation to firearms—not only as victims but as actors with agency, motivations, and decisions tied to guns?

That's precisely the conversation that Katherine Aguirre from Amassurru recently had with researcher and academic Peter Squires, whose work delves into the complexities of gender and firearms. In their discussion, Peter highlighted the evolution of arms control narratives from a gender perspective, urging us to think beyond traditional views. Women are often seen as victims of violence in private spaces, particularly in the home, where firearms escalate risks of domestic abuse, accidents, and suicides. But there's a public dimension too, particularly in Latin America, where gun violence spills into the streets and disproportionately affects women during surges in violence. Countries like Mexico, Ecuador, and regions like Santa Fe, Argentina, have witnessed spikes in femicides involving firearms.

What's even more compelling is the idea of women not just as passive victims but as agents with complex relationships to firearms. Whether it's for self-defense, participation in public forces, or involvement in organized crime, women's motivations and experiences around firearms differ significantly from those of men. Yet, these complexities are often ignored in favor of simplistic narratives.

Peter's insights remind us that the gendered dynamics of gun ownership aren't just a North American issue, though his research focuses primarily on the U.S. gun market. Globally, from South Africa to Latin America, Europe to the United States, there is a stark imbalance in gun ownership. The Small Arms Survey estimates that there are about 1 billion small arms in global circulation, with 857 million (85%) in civilian hands and men are estimated to own a large majority of these civilian firearms. This imbalance fuels violence, perpetuating toxic masculinities, and enabling violence against women.

Interestingly, in the U.S., gun advocacy movements have increasingly targeted women as part of their marketing strategy. Peter refers to this as a

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“pistolized feminism”—a form of feminism that promotes the idea that women can empower themselves by owning and using guns, often framed as a way to escape the violence that threatens them. Yet, as Peter points out, this narrative is inherently flawed. “It’s almost like the mutually assured destruction argument... that if we arm women, they will be safer because we are not going to disarm men”, says Peter. The data shows that the most likely perpetrators of violence against women are those they already know, not strangers lurking in a dark alley.

As Katherine notes, this perception—that more firearms are a solution to the threat of violence—extends beyond the U.S. to places like Latin America. Women who carry guns in public spaces, supposedly for self-defense, are often not protected by their own firearms. In fact, the presence of a firearm increases the likelihood that they will be shot with their own weapon. These myths, which are perpetuated globally, obscure the real issues at hand. Katherine highlighted that more guns rarely make for safer societies, and gendered power dynamics deeply influence how firearms are used and controlled. What can we do about this? As Peter noted “What we need is more community-based collective strategies to reduce the kind of tensions that guns are meant to solve...the answers don’t lie in pouring guns into a situation, the answers lie in rather more collective strategies and in attempts to overcome rifts and tensions and conflicts that people arms themselves about.”

This conversation between Amassuru and Peter offers a refreshing perspective on these dynamics. It’s a reminder that the relationship between women and firearms is far more complex than the binary of victimhood or empowerment. It requires us to dig deeper into the motivations, risks, and societal forces that shape women’s experiences with firearms—whether as people in public spaces, participants in armed groups, or leaders in gun control movements.

As we begin to consider these entrenched narratives, there is an opportunity to rethink not just policy but the cultural understandings that surround gun ownership and gender. The question becomes not just how firearms affect women, but how women, in their various roles, can reshape the conversation about guns and safety. In a world increasingly defined by the interplay of violence, gender, and power, women’s voices and perspectives, along with their actions, are more critical than ever.

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This bulletin, *Armas & Género*, aims to continue that conversation, highlighting perspectives from women across Latin America and beyond. Through this second edition of the *Armas & Género*, co-published by Amassuru and GENSAC, we aim to update and deepen the knowledge on this issue, particularly with new data and analyses from the past two years. Whether it's through their roles as advocates, researchers, or policymakers, the women contributing to this bulletin are reframing the debate—moving us closer to a future where gender-sensitive interventions can truly make a difference in addressing the global scourge of gun violence.

This bulletin aims to advance discourse on arms and gender by elevating a range of research and analysis from a number of contributors. The opinions and findings expressed here are those of the contributors and do not necessarily reflect the stances of Amassuru and GENSAC



All files (mostly in Spanish) here

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