

Comprehensive Law, Constrained Conversion: Prosecutorial Attrition in France's Gender-Based Violence Enforcement System (2024 Data Cycle)

Jessica Ingrid

Institutum Lex Feminae, Paris

Abstract

This paper presents an outcome-based enforcement audit of France's response to gender-based violence (GBV), using consolidated 2024 administrative data published by the Ministry of the Interior's statistical service (SSMSI) and the Ministry of Justice's statistical service (SSER). Rather than evaluating statutory design or policy intent, the analysis isolates the enforcement chain (reporting, prosecutorial filtering, judicial conversion, sentencing, and protection-order compliance) to test whether legal protections translate into enforceable outcomes. Applying the Lex Feminae Index outcome-based audit methodology, the paper finds that France maintains a comprehensive statutory framework and an active, well-documented investigative and judicial apparatus, yet judicial conversion from identified suspect to final conviction remains structurally narrow: approximately 29% for intimate partner violence and 8.9% for rape in the 2024 cycle. Attrition concentrates disproportionately at the prosecutorial-activation stage rather than at trial, a pattern consistent with the comparative “justice gap” literature on sexual-violence attrition. The absence of a codified femicide offense and of a unified breach-to-sanction dataset for judicial protection orders further constrain offence-level traceability. These findings place France's 2024 enforcement performance below the threshold the Index reserves for demonstrated protection delivery, notwithstanding an operational legal and institutional architecture, and are situated within the broader European enforcement-gap literature and the Council of Europe's Istanbul Convention monitoring findings on France.

I. Introduction

Legal systems are commonly evaluated by what they proscribe rather than by what they deliver. A century of law-and-society scholarship, beginning with Roscoe Pound's foundational distinction between “law in books” and “law in action,”¹ has cautioned against inferring protective capacity from statutory text alone. This distinction is acute in the field of gender-based violence (GBV), where comprehensive criminalization is now near-universal across Council of Europe member states, yet enforcement outcomes vary widely and are rarely subject to systematic, outcome-based measurement.

France offers an unusually favorable case for this kind of audit. Unlike many comparable jurisdictions, French public authorities publish granular, regularly updated administrative statistics linking police-recorded victimization, prosecutorial orientation, and judicial outcomes.² This transparency makes it possible to reconstruct the enforcement chain from initial complaint to final sentence with a degree of

¹Roscoe Pound, “Law in Books and Law in Action,” 44 American Law Review 12 (1910).

²See Part III, *infra*, and official sources cited therein.

precision rarely available elsewhere, and to ask a narrow, falsifiable question: **does enforcement practice produce measurable protection for women after violence occurs?**

This paper answers that question using the 2024 reporting cycle (the most recent complete annual dataset available at the time of writing) and applies the Lex Feminae Index, an outcome-based enforcement-audit methodology that intentionally excludes legislative intent, policy announcements, and strategic commitments from its scoring criteria, in order to isolate enforcement performance as a discrete object of measurement.³ The paper proceeds as follows. Part II situates the inquiry within the comparative attrition literature and the Council of Europe's Istanbul Convention monitoring framework. Part III sets out the data sources and the methodological limitations that govern their interpretation. Part IV presents findings across eight dimensions of the enforcement chain: statutory recognition, reporting, prosecutorial filtering, judicial throughput, conviction ratios, sentencing, protection measures, and data transparency. Part V discusses the resulting structural assessment and grade determination. Part VI addresses limitations, and Part VII concludes.

II. Literature and Normative Framework

A. The Comparative “Justice Gap”

A substantial empirical literature documents that reported sexual and intimate partner violence attrites disproportionately as it moves through the criminal justice system, relative to other violent offenses. Kelly, Lovett and Regan's Home Office study of rape attrition in England and Wales found that only a small fraction of reported rapes resulted in conviction, and that attrition was concentrated at pre-trial decision points rather than at acquittal.⁴ A subsequent cross-national study tracking attrition in reported rape cases across eleven European jurisdictions found broadly similar funnel-shaped patterns despite considerable variation in statutory definitions and procedural systems, suggesting that the “justice gap” is a structural feature of enforcement systems rather than an artifact of any single jurisdiction's substantive law.⁵ The findings below situate France within this comparative pattern: a system with active investigative institutions but a judicial conversion rate that narrows sharply and unevenly by offense category.

B. The Istanbul Convention Baseline

France ratified the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (“Istanbul Convention”) in 2014. In its first baseline evaluation of France, the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO) identified several structural gaps that bear directly on the enforcement chain examined here, including the need to strengthen inter-institutional coordination, to increase the number and geographic distribution of specialist victim services, to intensify professional training across the justice chain, and to revise the statutory

³The Lex Feminae Index is an outcome-based enforcement-audit methodology developed by the author; grades are assigned strictly from enforcement outcomes, independent of legislative ambition or policy commitments.

⁴Liz Kelly, Jo Lovett & Linda Regan, *A Gap or a Chasm? Attrition in Reported Rape Cases*, Home Office Research Study 293, Home Office, London (2005).

⁵Jo Lovett & Liz Kelly, *Different Systems, Similar Outcomes? Tracking Attrition in Reported Rape Cases Across Europe*, Child and Woman Abuse Studies Unit, London Metropolitan University (2009).

definition of rape and sexual assault toward a consent-based standard.⁶ GREVIO has since undertaken thematic follow-up monitoring of France's implementation.⁷ The persistence, five reporting cycles later, of a pronounced attrition gap at the prosecutorial-activation stage (documented in Part IV below) indicates that several of the coordination and institutional-capacity concerns GREVIO identified in 2019 remain reflected in outcome data.

C. Femicide as a Statistical and Penal Category

A further point of comparative interest concerns the absence, in France as in most Council of Europe jurisdictions, of a standalone penal offense of femicide. Gender-motivated killing is prosecuted through the ordinary law of homicide and its aggravating circumstances, with administrative statistics identifying intimate-partner killings at the reporting level without a corresponding offense-specific code in judicial conviction data. This creates a traceability gap between administrative reporting and judicial outcome data that is examined in Part IV.H below.

III. Data and Methods

A. Data Scope

This assessment relies exclusively on official statistical publications issued by the Ministry of the Interior's statistical service (SSMSI) and the Ministry of Justice's statistical service (SSER), together with the Ministry of Justice's 2025 report to the Minister of Justice on the judicial treatment of intra-family violence.⁸ No NGO datasets, advocacy estimates, media compilations, or external projections are used. All figures cited derive from officially published national statistical sources for the 2024 reporting cycle.

B. Administrative Counting Limits

Victim figures reflect administrative counting by infraction and may include multiple entries per individual within a given procedure. Counts should therefore be read as procedural volumes rather than as unduplicated individual headcounts.

C. Police–Justice Interoperability Limits

Where police-recorded and judicial datasets are not fully interoperable, this paper follows the limitations described in the SSMSI–SSER joint methodological note on administrative data matching, which reports an optimized matching rate of approximately 81% between police and justice records for intimate partner violence cases.⁹ Judicial outcomes for the unmatched share cannot be directly attributed to a specific police-recorded complaint cohort.

⁶Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO), Baseline Evaluation Report on France, GREVIO/Inf(2019)16, Council of Europe (Nov. 19, 2019).

⁷Council of Europe, Istanbul Convention monitoring mechanism, GREVIO thematic evaluation visits to France (ongoing as of this writing); see coe.int, Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence.

⁸Gwenola Joly-Coz, "À vif": Rapport au Garde des Sceaux sur le traitement judiciaire des violences intrafamiliales, Ministère de la Justice (Nov. 25, 2025).

⁹Ministère de la Justice, SSER, Dossier Méthode n°2: Appariements des données administratives des services de sécurité intérieure et de la justice, le cas des violences conjugales (Dec. 2025).

D. Conviction Timing Clarification

Conviction figures reflect cases reaching judicial resolution within the 2024 reporting year and do not represent direct cohort conversion between complaints registered and convictions issued in the same year, given that criminal proceedings routinely span multiple reporting cycles. Ratios presented below (e.g., convictions relative to suspects) are therefore system-level annual performance indicators rather than same-year cohort conversion rates, consistent with the convention used in the underlying official statistics.

E. Scoring Framework

The Lex Feminae Index applies an ordinal grading scale (A through F) analogous in structure to composite indicators used elsewhere in comparative socio-legal research, such as the World Justice Project's Rule of Law Index.¹⁰ Grades are assigned strictly by reference to enforcement outcomes across the eight dimensions examined in Part IV; legislative ambition, policy announcements, and budgetary commitments are excluded from the scoring criteria by design. The reasoning supporting the specific grade assigned to France in the 2024 cycle is set out in Part V.

IV. Findings

A. Legal Recognition and Statutory Framework

France criminalizes rape and sexual assault, domestic violence (physical, psychological, and sexual), intimate partner homicide, and, through existing statutory provisions rather than a single consolidated offense, harassment and coercive-control-related conduct. Homicide is criminalized under Article 221-1 of the Penal Code, and killings committed by a spouse, former spouse, partner, or former partner are recognized as aggravating circumstances under Article 221-4 of the Penal Code.¹¹ On statutory design alone, the legal framework is comprehensive.

B. Reporting Accessibility and Victim Registration

For the 2024 reporting cycle, French police and gendarmerie services recorded 272,382 victims of intimate partner violence (84% women), 122,600 victims of sexual violence across all contexts (85% women), 46,297 victims of rape, and 134 intimate partner homicides.¹² Victimization surveys conducted independently of administrative recording indicate that only approximately 6% of adult sexual violence victims and 14–22% of physical violence victims file a formal complaint.¹³ Police-recorded data is publicly accessible, nationally consolidated, and published annually, representing a high degree of transparency in

¹⁰World Justice Project, Rule of Law Index, methodology overview (2024 ed.); cited here as a comparator for the use of ordinal composite grading in comparative socio-legal research, not as a source of France-specific data.

¹¹Code pénal (Fr.), arts. 221-1 (meurtre), 221-4 (circonstances aggravantes du meurtre, y compris commission par le conjoint, l'ex-conjoint, le partenaire ou l'ex-partenaire).

¹²Ministère de l'Intérieur, SSMSI, Interstats Info Rapide n°47: Les victimes de violences physiques ou sexuelles enregistrées par les services de sécurité en 2024 (2025); Interstats Info Rapide n°56: Les violences conjugales enregistrées par les services de sécurité, quasi-stabilisation en 2024 (Nov. 2025).

¹³Ministère de l'Intérieur, Observatoire national des violences faites aux femmes (MIPROF), Lettre n°25: Les violences sexistes et sexuelles en France en 2024 (Nov. 2025).

recorded violence; the gap between survey-estimated prevalence and administrative recording nonetheless indicates a severe reporting gap upstream of the enforcement chain examined in the remainder of this paper.

C. Prosecutorial Filtering

For sexual violence, 43,738 suspects were registered in 2024, of whom prosecutors deemed 69% of cases legally actionable; 78.4% of actionable cases proceeded to formal prosecution.¹⁴ For intimate partner violence, 145,389 suspects were identified, of whom 42,229 ultimately resulted in a final conviction. Prosecutorial activity is therefore both active and well documented at each stage; filtering is significant in scale but does not, on these figures alone, appear structurally obstructive at the case-orientation stage.

D. Judicial Throughput

Table 1 reconstructs the enforcement funnel for intimate partner violence and rape using 2024 judicial-intake, prosecution, and final-conviction figures.¹⁵

Table 1. Enforcement Funnel, 2024 Data Cycle

Stage	Intimate Partner Violence	Rape
Judicial intake (suspects)	145,389	18,781
Prosecutions initiated	54,360	5,373
Final convictions	42,229	1,665
Prosecutorial activation rate	37%	28%
Conviction rate relative to suspects	29%	8.9%
Conviction rate relative to prosecutions	78%	31%

Two patterns emerge. First, once prosecution is initiated, conviction likelihood is high in both categories (78% for IPV, 31% for rape), indicating that cases which survive the prosecutorial-activation stage are adjudicated with reasonable efficiency. Second, structural narrowing occurs predominantly at the prosecutorial-activation stage itself rather than at trial: fewer than two in five identified IPV suspects and fewer than three in ten identified rape suspects are formally prosecuted at all. This distribution (high conviction conditional on prosecution, but a narrow prosecution rate relative to suspect intake) mirrors the attrition pattern identified in the comparative literature discussed in Part II.A, and indicates that throughput depth in rape cases in particular remains structurally limited.

E. Conviction Ratios

Conviction output must be evaluated against the justice-phase dataset (suspects and prosecutions) rather than against police-recorded victim intake, since the latter includes victims for whom no suspect was identified or apprehended. On this basis, 29% of identified IPV suspects and 8.9% of identified rape

¹⁴Figures consolidated from SSMSI and SSER 2024-cycle publications per the linkage methodology set out in Dossier Méthode n°2, supra note 9.

¹⁵See Dossier Méthode n°2, supra note 9; SSER 2024-cycle judicial statistics.

suspects resulted in a final conviction in the 2024 cycle. These figures reflect system-level annual performance rather than same-year complaint-to-conviction cohort conversion (see Part III.D), and attrition patterns differ meaningfully across procedural classifications.

F. Sentencing and Deterrence

Among criminal convictions recorded in 2024, 58% concerned rape and 31% concerned homicide or serious intentional violence; 99% of criminal convictions resulted in imprisonment, and 52% carried sentences of 10 to 20 years.¹⁶ Sentencing severity for crimes reaching conviction is therefore high and consistently custodial. Recidivism data nonetheless indicates limits to deterrent effect: among defendants subject to a judicial protection order and subsequently implicated in further proceedings, 51.2% had at least one prior conviction for intimate partner violence.¹⁷ This figure should be read as specific to the protection-order-linked defendant population studied in the underlying Infostat Justice publication rather than as a general recidivism rate across all IPV convictions.

G. Protection Measures

In 2024, France recorded 6,826 applications for judicial protection orders (*ordonnances de protection*), of which 6,741 were decided, with 91% of decisions granting protection, corresponding to approximately 6,100 protection orders effectively issued during the year.¹⁸ Judicial protection mechanisms are therefore operational and accessible in practice. Enforcement effectiveness following issuance, however, cannot be fully externally verified: public reporting does not provide a consolidated national dataset detailing the proportion of breaches resulting in detention, the speed of post-breach judicial response, or the proportion of repeat violations. Even applied conservatively to the annual volume of granted orders, a modest breach rate would represent several hundred violations of court-ordered protection within a single year (a non-trivial number of affected individuals), even though breach is not numerically dominant relative to the volume of orders issued.

H. Data Integrity and Transparency

France publishes police-recorded data (SSMSI–Interstats), prosecutorial orientation data (Infostat Justice), judicial conviction summaries, and data-linkage methodology, including the 81% police–justice matching rate discussed in Part III.C; statistical limitations are documented publicly and in detail.¹⁹ Two gaps nonetheless limit full offence-level traceability. First, judicial conviction data is not published in a unified intimate partner violence conviction dataset permitting direct tracing from recorded victim category through to final conviction outcome. Second, as discussed in Part II.C, femicide is reported at the administrative level but is not codified as a distinct penal qualification, which limits offense-specific disaggregation within

¹⁶Ministère de la Justice, SSER, judicial conviction statistics, 2024 reporting cycle, as consolidated in Infostat Justice publications, *supra*.

¹⁷Ministère de la Justice, SSER, Infostat Justice n°200: Violences conjugales, de l'ordonnance de protection au parcours pénal du défendeur (June 2025). The 51.2% figure applies to defendants subject to a judicial protection order who were subsequently implicated in further proceedings, not to the general population of IPV convictions.

¹⁸Ministère de la Justice, SSER, statistiques des ordonnances de protection, cycle 2024; see also Joly-Coz, "À vif," *supra* note 8.

¹⁹See Dossier Méthode n°2, *supra* note 9.

judicial conviction datasets. National data consolidation and transparency are otherwise strong by comparative standards; the incompleteness is specifically at the offence-level judicial disaggregation layer.

I. Climate Risk Modifier

The Lex Feminae Index methodology includes a climate risk modifier assessing whether disaster displacement is linked, in available data, to GBV enforcement outcomes. No integrated dataset links disaster displacement to GBV enforcement outcomes in France; the modifier accordingly does not alter the grade determination in this cycle.

V. Discussion: Structural Assessment and Grade Determination

The central question posed in Part I (whether enforcement practice produces measurable protection for women after violence occurs) yields a mixed but assessable answer on the 2024 data. Judicial throughput demonstrates measurable activity but constrained conversion depth. In intimate partner violence cases, fewer than one-third of identified suspects result in final conviction; in rape cases, fewer than one in ten do so within the reporting cycle. As shown in Part IV.D, this throughput limitation occurs primarily at the prosecutorial-activation stage and is most pronounced in sexual violence cases specifically.

Three considerations support classifying France's 2024 enforcement performance as **Grade D (Weak Enforcement)** under the Index's outcome-based criteria, rather than the intermediate Grade C reserved for uneven but not structurally narrow enforcement:

First, the structural throughput gap. The most consequential enforcement metric under an outcome-based methodology is judicial conversion capacity within the justice-phase dataset. At 8.9% of identified rape suspects and 29% of identified IPV suspects, conversion to conviction is uneven across core GBV categories, and enforcement depth in serious sexual violence in particular is structurally limited. Grade C, by the Index's criteria, requires judicial engagement whose conversion, while uneven, does not reflect structurally narrow throughput in serious offense categories; the rape-specific figures here fall below that threshold.

Second, traceability and codification. Grade C tolerates identifiable but potentially fragmented enforcement traceability across the judicial chain. As discussed in Part IV.H, France does not maintain a standalone penal offense for femicide, and judicial statistical publications do not provide consolidated offense-specific disaggregation permitting direct linkage from prosecution to final conviction in gender-motivated homicide cases. This limitation exceeds the fragmentation tolerated under Grade C.

Third, protection versus operational verification. Protective mechanisms exist in law and are demonstrably accessible in practice (Part IV.G). Grade C requires protection mechanisms to function with identifiable breach-to-sanction enforcement, even if inconsistently applied. Because breach-to-sanction tracking is not consolidated within a unified enforcement dataset, protection reliability cannot be externally verified at the level Grade C requires.

Taken together, these three findings (evaluated strictly against outcome-based criteria and independent of the comprehensiveness of France's statutory framework) support a classification of **Grade D, Weak**

Enforcement, with a **stagnant trend indicator** reflecting the structural persistence of these enforcement patterns across recent reporting cycles as documented in official statistical continuity.²⁰

VI. Limitations

This audit is subject to several limitations inherent in its reliance on official administrative statistics. First, victim and suspect counts reflect administrative counting conventions and are not adjusted for multiple procedural entries per individual (Part III.B). Second, the 81% police–justice matching rate means a residual share of judicial outcomes cannot be directly linked to a specific police-recorded cohort (Part III.C). Third, because conviction figures reflect cases resolved within the 2024 calendar year rather than a tracked complaint cohort, the ratios presented are system-level annual performance indicators rather than true cohort-conversion rates (Part III.D); a formal cohort-tracking design, of the kind used in the Ministry of Justice's own protection-order defendant-trajectory study, would refine but is unlikely to reverse the structural pattern identified here.²¹ Fourth, this paper draws on a single reporting cycle; the “stagnant” trend indicator reflects continuity with prior cycles as documented in official statistical publications rather than an independent multi-year regression. Finally, as an outcome-based audit, this paper does not evaluate (and takes no position on) the adequacy of French legislative design, policy commitments, or resourcing decisions; it measures only whether current enforcement practice, as reflected in 2024 administrative outcomes, converts recorded violence into judicial and protective outcomes.

VII. Conclusion

Applying an outcome-based enforcement-audit methodology to France's 2024 gender-based violence statistics reveals a system with comprehensive statutory coverage and active, transparently documented investigative and judicial institutions, but with judicial conversion that narrows sharply and unevenly across offense categories, most acutely in rape prosecutions, where fewer than one in ten identified suspects result in conviction. Attrition concentrates at the prosecutorial-activation stage rather than at trial, consistent with the comparative “justice gap” literature, and two traceability gaps (the absence of a codified femicide offense and the absence of a unified protection-order breach-to-sanction dataset) limit external verification of enforcement effectiveness beyond initial issuance or prosecution. These findings support a Grade D (“Weak Enforcement”) classification under the Lex Feminae Index for the 2024 data cycle, notwithstanding an operational legal and institutional architecture, and suggest that future gains in measured protection are more likely to come from closing the prosecutorial-activation gap and consolidating offence-level judicial data than from further statutory reform.

²⁰See Interstats Info Rapide n°56 (Nov. 2025) and Infostat Justice n°206 (Dec. 2025), documenting multi-cycle statistical continuity in enforcement patterns.

²¹See Infostat Justice n°200, *supra* note 17.

References

Official Statistical and Institutional Sources

- Ministère de l'Intérieur, Service statistique ministériel de la sécurité intérieure (SSMSI), Interstats Info Rapide n°47: Les victimes de violences physiques ou sexuelles enregistrées par les services de sécurité en 2024 (2025).
- Ministère de l'Intérieur, SSMSI, Interstats Info Rapide n°56: Les violences conjugales enregistrées par les services de sécurité, quasi-stabilisation en 2024 (Nov. 2025).
- Ministère de l'Intérieur, SSMSI, Interstats Info Rapide n°57: Les victimes de violences physiques hors cadre familial enregistrées par les services de sécurité en 2024 (2025).
- Ministère de l'Intérieur, SSMSI, Interstats Info Rapide n°59: Les violences intrafamiliales non conjugales en 2024 (Jan. 2026).
- Ministère de la Justice, Service statistique ministériel de la justice (SSER), Infostat Justice n°200: Violences conjugales, de l'ordonnance de protection au parcours pénal du défendeur (June 2025).
- Ministère de la Justice, SSER, Dossier Méthode n°2: Appariements des données administratives des services de sécurité intérieure et de la justice, le cas des violences conjugales (Dec. 2025).
- Ministère de la Justice, Joly-Coz, G., «À vif»: Rapport au Garde des Sceaux sur le traitement judiciaire des violences intrafamiliales (Nov. 25, 2025).
- Ministère de l'Intérieur, Observatoire national des violences faites aux femmes (MIPROF), Lettre n°25: Les violences sexistes et sexuelles en France en 2024 (Nov. 2025).

Legal Instruments

- Code pénal (Fr.), art. 221-1 (meurtre).
- Code pénal (Fr.), art. 221-4 (circonstances aggravantes du meurtre).
- Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, opened for signature May 11, 2011, C.E.T.S. No. 210 (entered into force for France 2014) (“Istanbul Convention”).

Secondary and Academic Sources

- Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO), Baseline Evaluation Report on France, GREVIO/Inf(2019)16, Council of Europe (Nov. 19, 2019).
- Kelly, L., Lovett, J. & Regan, L., A Gap or a Chasm? Attrition in Reported Rape Cases, Home Office Research Study 293, Home Office, London (2005).
- Lovett, J. & Kelly, L., Different Systems, Similar Outcomes? Tracking Attrition in Reported Rape Cases Across Europe, Child and Woman Abuse Studies Unit, London Metropolitan University (2009).
- Pound, R., Law in Books and Law in Action, 44 Am. L. Rev. 12 (1910).
- World Justice Project, Rule of Law Index (methodology overview) (2024 ed.).