

Doing politics from the margins: ethnicity, harassment and gender-based political violence case study of former councilors in the department of La Paz, 2015-2021

Abstract

This article discusses the application of Law 243 on Violence and Political Harassment in Councilors and Mayors of the department of La Paz who served during the 2015 - 2021 mandate period, emphasizing the work of the Association of Councilors and Mayors of La Paz. ACOLAPAZ in the attention and representation of complaints of Violence and Political Harassment (VAP) and the expressions of violence manifested towards this group during the mentioned period, reflecting through the ethnographic method and in-depth interviews on said problem; as well as the contemporary conditions of violence in Bolivia and the differences due to gender and ethnicity.

Keywords: violence and political harassment, Law 243, masculinity, culture, gender

Volume 7 Issue 6 - 2023

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Received: November 20, 2023 | **Published:** December 01, 2023

Introduction

Our purpose is to contribute to the gender analysis regarding violence and political harassment, considering that gender includes the male and female sex, in addition to the fact that the regulations in force in Bolivia recognize and establish the political participation of men and women in equal proportions at all levels of representation.

The analysis presented here considers triangulated data from ACOLAPAZ,¹ non-participant observation following the ethnographic method and interviews with former councilors and a mayor who have served in different municipalities of the department of La Paz in the last municipal period extended from 2015 to 2021. The concepts that try to support this analysis are related to the concept of Violence, since after the promulgation of Law 243, there is a vague understanding about what is really understood by political violence, leading to certain biases giving an idea that political violence is exercised against women just because they are women, an idea that is discussed in this document and we consider that; In this area, violence is not only exercised against women for the fact of being women, but also against men and the types, as well as the expressions of violence that are exercised, are related to different aspects such as: the cultural practices of the context, the use of power, as well as some mandates of masculinity that are described and ethnic-cultural differences.

The title comes from the differences found in the exercise of politics between the urban area and the rural area, presenting excerpts from interviews of both men and women former councilors that reflect the perceptions of the actors regarding their experiences of VAP, preserving their identity in order not to re-victimize them and at their own request.

The discussion and conclusions lie in the need to have an analysis and attention to VAP cases in a comprehensive manner, avoiding falling into gender biases that include only women as victims but also men in a bidirectional and intragender manner, delving into normalized cultural issues. , the fragility of the norm and the perceptions of the victims regarding the inefficiency and slowness in the application of the law since 2013, the year in which Law 243 was promulgated until the date of 2021, there is only one known case

that has reached a ruling,² considering that policies that guarantee the political participation of women and men under equal opportunities and conditions must be thought more seriously.

The lawsuit filed in 2015 by Felipa Huanca, former candidate for the governorship of La Paz for the Movement Towards Socialism (MAS - IPSP) against the then deputy for Democratic Unity (UD), Rafael Quispe, for the crimes of political violence against women, discrimination and political harassment; It concluded in 2021 with the issuance of the sentence by the First Anti-Corruption and Violence Against Women Sentencing Court, of a two-year custodial sentence.

Theoretical and regulatory framework

Considering that this social problem includes male elected members of municipal councils, the research is supported by the concepts of: violence, gender, power and masculinity. Some developed widely and others assimilated in a concrete way.

Violence, gender, power and the mandate of masculinity

Violence in the words of Joseph S. Roucek corresponds to the "application of force in such a way that it is physically or psychologically harmful to the person or group against whom it is applied" it is the "illegal use of methods of physical coercion to personal or group purposes". In the same sense, Espinoza Luna³ affirms that violence alters and reconstructs the intersubjective meaning of social interactions; Therefore she - she maintains that - there will be no policy against it that will be successful if it is not sensitive to the profound effects it generates on those who suffer from it. Furthermore, disputes between individuals or social groups that are not resolved with criteria of law or morality are resolved through violence. For expressions of violence and harassment in the exercise of politics, Bolivian legislation has established its own concept in Law 243 on Harassment and Political Violence. In general terms, it includes harassment as "the act or set of acts of pressure, persecution, harassment or threats, committed by people, directly or through third parties, against women candidates, elected, appointed or exercising political functions." - publicly or against their families with the purpose of shortening, suspending, preventing or restricting the

functions inherent to their position, to induce or force them to carry out, against their will, an action or incur an omission, in compliance of their functions or in the exercise of their rights. Violence is understood as “the actions, behaviors and/or physical, psychological, and sexual attacks committed by a person or group of people, directly or through third parties, against women candidates, elected, appointed, or in the exercise of political office.” – public or against their families...” with the same purpose as harassment.⁴

These definitions, according to Law 243, refer exclusively to all acts perpetrated against women, which is why following the notion of gender, these definitions will also be extended to men since, despite the fact that in recent years the concept of gender has been handled as exclusive for addressing the problem of the female gender, in terms of Beauvoir⁵ the notion of gender includes both sexes; the feminine and the masculine (...) so we assume that gender includes both sexes; since both are subjects of rights and participants in municipal politics based on the regulations in force in the country. Thus, violence in the area of study will be understood as the application of force in such a way that it is physically or psychologically harmful to the person or group against whom it is applied, in addition to the illegal use of methods of physical coercion for personal or political purposes. Group. It is socially defined according to the criteria of law and morality, since the same act may or may not be violent for the person who suffers it, hence the subjectivity and objectivity of violence. In the exercise of political office, violence has the purpose of shortening, suspending, preventing or restricting the functions inherent to the position, to induce or force the individual to carry out an action against his or her will or incur an omission in the fulfillment of duties their functions or in the exercise of their political rights.

Alberto Montbrun refers that power appears in political doctrine always linked to the ability of some people to impose certain behaviors on other people even against their will. Asserting that in social life power has been seen as “the possibility of imposing one’s will on others through some specific means, knowledge, intelligence, strength, wealth, dogma or any factor that serves to encourage others to do what they would not do in other circumstances”. In this regard, Max Weber establishes that power is “the probability of imposing one’s will, within a social relationship, even against all resistance and whatever the basis of that probability”. For the author, power is always referred to the intentionality and will of the individual who exercises it. However, Hannah Arendt⁶ states that power is the human capacity to act in concert and in this sense it is typical of every community. This capacity can only be effective if it includes the consent of the governed, and if the support and support of the group or community disappears, power vanishes. Thus, in the field of municipal politics, in the case of authorities who have assumed office through popular suffrage and representing certain sectors of the population, we understand that power is the probability and possibility according to mandate; to impose one’s will on others through some specific means; knowledge, intelligence... or any factor that serves to encourage others to do what in other circumstances they would not do, said obedience is based on the conviction of the legitimacy of the mandate or convenience in consenting to it. It refers to the intentionality and will of the individual who exercises it. It is effective if it includes the consent of the governed and fades if it lacks the support of the community.⁶ In the case of elected councilors, according to their powers; legislation, oversight, deliberation and management powers before different instances, they use power in order to directly or indirectly comply with their electoral proposals.

The behavior of each person responds to certain expectations of society,⁷ this author addresses these expectations as social roles,

which vary depending on gender and that is why we generally review the behavioral expectations and attitudes expected of the person. Masculine gender in what is known as the mandate of masculinity, linking it with the exercise of power and politics. The first mandates of masculinity presented by Chiodi, Fabbri and Sánchez⁸ refer to the encouragement of independence; decision making and the development of both physical and intellectual capabilities. Care is linked to the sense of ownership and can become an exercise of power and control towards women. A culturally strong mandate is to be proactive, including the impossibility of refusing the sexual seduction of a woman, to avoid being classified as “gay.” From this mandate arises the mandate of compulsory heterosexuality, having to feel sexually attracted to people of the “opposite” sex. Being discriminated against or excluded for presenting attractions different from those established by their mandate. Physical strength and/or violence are attributes of desired masculinity, which leads them to stay away from the “feminine” and not be or appear homosexual.

Rational intelligence is attributed to men, considering them more suitable for jobs that involve responsibility, such as those related to science or politics of which we are talking. The naturalization of power ambitions gives them an advantageous position. The mandate of having to be someone, an important person and compete to gain recognition is very present in male socialization, as well as the search for prominence, implying that masculinity is measured through success, power and admiration that a man may be able to awaken in others.⁹ Michael Kimmel argues that the socialization that according to gender is received from childhood, for men is an intense journey of homosocial recognition, since they are under the care and continuous observation of other men, who look at them, classify and they grant acceptance or rejection in the so-called realm of manhood. Azpiazu Carballo reviews the emotional restriction that is one of the demands of masculinity, that impossibility of expressing emotions, especially those understood as feminine. Having allowed the expression of anger and annoyance, which are, in the author’s terms, emotions of the masculine social heritage, thus the understood gender order places men on the side of rationality and intelligence and women on the side of feelings and intuition. The forms of identity constitution, referred to by Rita Segato, cite the brotherhood or masculine identity as a structuring axis, which reproduces violence towards women and towards other identities that have been feminized by society. The same author (2018) states that following the mandate of masculinity; the man needs to endure the pain to show his masculinity and maintain his secure and providing position. Chiodi, Fabbri and Sánchez⁸ consider that men are constituted from the idea that their bodies and their subjectivities are impenetrable, on a symbolic, physical and material level. And this constitutive condition of being impenetrable does not imply that they necessarily are since it is a fiction. Violence being thus a constitutive part of the system of male domination, it is a necessary element to draw the boundaries between what is going to be considered a man or not, such as having to exert violence on another person and lead them to a situation of fragility in order to demonstrate that he is not fragile.

The most common way to show that you are not vulnerable is by violating someone else. Also thus producing unwanted categories of male; the weak, faggots, crybabies and mama’s sons. Pierre Bourdieu states that in the training process to become a “proper” man, a masculine way of placing himself in a hierarchy with women and a way of perceiving them from above with a dominant gaze is consolidated, thus strengthening in terms of Chiodi, Fabbri and Sánchez,⁸ the hegemonic masculinity of men compared to women. Following these precepts, we consider that in our environment, men are culturally

conditioned to show certain attitudes; compulsory heterosexuality, self-sufficiency, power ambitions, emotional restriction, endurance of pain and/or impenetrability. These values are reinforced in the field of political exercise by the mandate to demonstrate their masculinity through the use of power in hegemony over women⁹ and Chiodi, Fabbri and Sánchez,⁸ avoiding showing fragility, vulnerability and emotional weakness attributed to the female gender, enduring pain to preserve their masculine image which is constantly observed by other men, thus also becoming the first victims of the mandate of masculinity.^{8,10}

The Bolivian experience in the project of parity democracy

In the short history of our region, society has gone through problems that have been accentuated and made more visible during the time of quarantine in the 2020 administration, one of the most recurring problems that has generated the greatest impact is the political situation and management during this period in addition to the exercise of extreme and fatal violence against women and children.¹¹ However, when we talk about forms of violence during the exercise of political office, in the case of women it is an issue that has also generated actions and regulations since 2000 due to complaints from women councilors and mayors who have suffered acts of harassment and/or violence due to the exercise of their position, after years of complaints and given the emergence of the Association of Councilors and Mayors of Bolivia,¹² Law 243 has been promulgated against all forms of harassment and political violence towards women, establishing thus parameters and characteristics of what they consider to be harassment or violence and their sanctions.

In this area and by gender, Krook & Restrepo Sanín¹³ affirm that both men and women can be victims of electoral violence, since according to data from the International Foundation of Electoral Systems (IFES), more than two thousand cases of electoral violence in six countries between 2006 and 2010, have observed that there are particular patterns regarding the types of violence experienced by both sexes, for example: men are more likely to suffer physical violence and women tend to be victims of psychological abuse or some form of intimidation. When talking about harassment and political or electoral violence, this does not only happen with women because they are women, it is evident that many organizations and the state itself have focused on addressing women's problems in different aspects, including politics. , but in the case of municipal councils and other areas, there are not only women, but also men, of whom according to the quota law they represent the other 50% in office. Since both men and women can be victims for political reasons, we are going to review what has been said so far on the subject, starting with the increase in women's political participation.

Women in political participation

The 1990s were the beginning of positive action measures in several Latin American countries. Which recognize as a regulatory framework the resolution of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women of 1979, later reinforced by the recommendations of the Beijing Platform, thus enabling a significant increase in the presence of women in legislative bodies.¹⁴ However, politically, over time, most Western women have developed a civic sense – if not a political interest – as strong as that of men.¹⁵

At the regional level, the number of women who have held or hold public office has been increasing: “in 2003, Panama had a female President and Peru had a female Prime Minister. Furthermore, Chile and Colombia had a woman as head of the Armed Forces, according to

Fernández Poncela.¹⁶ We can also cite as an example the presidents of Argentina and Brazil who have publicly developed a certain political trajectory that has allowed them to reach those spheres. Each country has its peculiarities, for example; Venezuela has increased women's political participation considerably since 2000, even meeting the millennium goal of gender equality of the United Nations in 2011, and however formal equality does not translate into real equality. since the patriarchal culture has not disappeared and women still suffer discrimination and subordination, citing as a task the need to expand the coverage of education and training programs for the social and political participation of women in all areas of social life.¹⁷

In Mexico, Cedillo Delgado¹⁸ states that political recruitment is a means used by women to enter public positions, influencing fields that little by little have ceased to be exclusive territory for men, such as university life, for example or the work and professional field. In a similar way to the Venezuelan and Mexican cases, in Bolivia Vásquez¹⁹ reports that women's participation in politics has had a substantial increase in different political spheres, considering the case of the Movement towards Socialism (MAS - IPSP) an advance. and its participation in the political system, as the main political force in the country that has internal policies of parity and rotation; Thus constituting women's participation in windows of opportunity that could be worked on as potential spaces for them. Despite the constitutionalization of their rights, there is tension between the progressive regulations referring to women's rights in a patriarchal state and societal structure that would limit its real application. The author highlights that in the departmental and municipal elections of April 2010, in the 337 municipalities in the country, 43% (786) of the regular council positions were occupied by women, which is a great achievement for parity democracy. Since compared to 2004 and 2010, the percentage of women increased significantly at the national level. López Rosel & Quisbert Carvajal²⁰ state that in the 2014 national elections, the municipal councils for the first time were composed mostly of women who represented 51% of the total number of elected councilors, a fact that is reinforced by Sánchez, Pereira and Quisbert⁸ in the case of women senators and deputies, stating that they have been empowered in circles of influence with social and political recognition, whether from the government party or the opposition, having achieved a certain track record and demonstrated its capabilities by consolidating itself in political spaces such as the Plurinational Legislative Assembly.

Bolivia: from the old quota system to parity and alternation in the election of authorities

In terms of Albaine,²¹ Law No. 1779 of Reform and Complementation of the Electoral Regime of 1997, established the implementation of gender quotas; 2) the Political Parties Law established that political parties establish a quota of no less than 30% for women at all levels of party leadership and in candidates for positions of citizen representation (Art. 19 Inc. IV) , and 3) the Law of Citizen Groups and Indigenous Peoples (2004) established a parity system by establishing a quota of 50% for each sex in all candidates.

Recently, the constitutional reform of 2009 established that in the election of representatives of the Plurinational Legislative Assembly, 1) the equal participation of men and women will be guaranteed (Art. 147); At the same time, 2) the Plurinational Electoral Body (Art. 210) will regulate the internal election of leaders and candidates, seeking to guarantee the equal participation of men and women.²¹

Pär Zetterberg²² maintains that quotas by themselves do not resolve the issue of women's political participation and that it is necessary to have a more comprehensive look at the party political culture in the

countries, since they are the relative and centralized behaviors of power of political parties that determine their real application in all areas of representation and political participation, though, for example, the arbitrary election of male and female candidates or in the definition of positions in ministerial portfolios, this would explain why, in many cases, women do not find the guarantee for the substantive exercise of their political rights. Comparing the representation in the 2004 and 2010 administrations between the regular and alternate positions held by women, which in 2004 was 19% of regular women, compared to 81% of men, in 2010 the percentage rose to 43% compared to 57% of men. Who held the council as holders? Vásquez Sotelo suggests that women would be “pushed” to occupy substitute positions just to comply with parity, limiting the political space to female representatives. In 2010, parity and alternation in the electoral lists were complied with (...) As it was a “mandatory” mandate for political parties and citizen groups, the norm had to be applied, but these principles, in the case of women were distorted in practice.¹⁹

Rodríguez Calva & Friaz,²³ in their study of the Mexican political system, conclude that women must continually demonstrate that they have talent or that they are doubly capable and when they decide to become candidates they must do so before those who make the decisions in the political parties that in their majority are men. After winning the candidacy, insinuations and tensions arise from others, including other members of the party, especially when it is a candidacy that covers a quota. Once they reach office, their abilities are questioned to discredit her and force her to resign, thus it is very common for women to face the impossibility of making their own decisions because they are subject to the negotiations or decisions of others, and many times they are pressured by third parties to make involuntary decisions which causes them a lot of stress. Thus, it is increasingly evident that strategies such as gender quotas do not completely level the political playing field for women, and can trigger resistance and violent reactions against female political integration.¹³

In this sense, we understand that since quotas are mandatory, which has been an achievement of many women who are prepared to hold office and who follow a certain political trajectory, there are also women who are not prepared and do not have the necessary preparation for it and have come to politics due to different factors, which is why, faced with the obligation, “organizations are forced to appoint anyone simply for being a woman, even if they do not have the knowledge or will to comply. If they are elected, they ‘fall short’ of the position, their performance is poor and they are sometimes manipulated or pressured to resign in favor of their male substitutes” (Spedding, 2021:4). Manipulation of men and even women who already have knowledge of municipal politics and induces them to enter into the game of an illegal dynamic, called a shared management agreement, which triggers harassment or political violence towards women. This dynamic seems to be referred to in the statement of a councilor who states that: “Social organizations do not recognize women, they do not believe in us or that we are capable of doing anything, they have only put us as a ladder, but not with conscience, because That’s how they said they have to put us because the Constitution says it, but nothing more”.¹⁹

Quota policy

Violence and political harassment: definition and law

As mentioned previously, the increase in women’s participation in politics has also generated regulations that try to protect them from actions that generate harassment and political violence against them. Example; The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Violence and Discrimination against Women (CEDAW in English),

in its article 7 determines that States must take appropriate measures, as does article 5 of the Inter-American Convention to prevent, punish and To eradicate violence against women, the “Convention of Belem do Pará” provides that every woman can freely and fully exercise civil and political rights, among others.

The Bolivian State, through Art. 26 of its charter, establishes that all citizens have the right to participate freely in the exercise and control of political power on equal terms between men and women. According to the Gender Equality Observatory of Latin America and the Caribbean. The Observatory’s repository of violence laws currently has more than 380 regulatory bodies, from 38 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, however, law 243 against harassment and political violence towards women of the Plurinational State of Bolivia and the law that sanctions harassment against women in the political life of Peru are unique and specific in the political sphere in the region.

In terms of Vásquez,¹⁹ Bolivia has become the first country in the region that has formulated a norm to punish harassment and political violence against women, through law No. 243 against Harassment and Political Violence towards Women. Promulgated on May 28, 2012, due to the influence of the Association of Councilors of Bolivia with the support of several women’s organizations, in the face of the violence that had been exercised against them, a trigger was the murder of the councilor of Ancoraimés Juana Quispe, who is said to have been a victim of political violence. In October 2016, the regulation of the law was approved, which establishes a procedure for the prevention and immediate attention to cases of violence and political harassment. It is assumed that the mechanism must be activated when the integrity of elected women is at risk.²⁴

The law aims to prevent, address and punish individual and collective acts of harassment and/or political violence against women, to guarantee the full exercise of their political rights. It has regulations that establish offenses and sanctions according to their severity, which we do not consider necessary to describe in detail, however, it must be considered that according to this norm: pressure or induce an elected authority to resign from office and restrict The enjoyment of their rights such as salary is considered a very serious offense.

Violence and political harassment: numbers and cases

In the process of searching for information related to violence against men and women in political positions, we found more information referring to women, leaving the cases of men outside the treatment given to the female gender. However, we tried to articulate the information found in the following paragraphs.

In terms of the work promoted by ACOBOL, carried out by Vásquez,¹⁹ the presence and leadership of women has led to them not only assuming representative positions in primary places in politics but also advancing to position themselves in the highest political positions in a country. Country, as has been happening at the Latin American level. However, these new leaderships have also brought about a social and structural phenomenon that historically weighs on women, the harassment and political violence that they exercise against them and manifests itself in different ways that affect the normal exercise of their functions and representation policy.

Racialization and social inequalities: experiences of indigenous peasant women and men

The emergence of women into political decision-making spaces has encountered numerous obstacles, giving rise to situations of harassment and violence. The harassment suffered by a councilor by

a municipal authority stimulated the creation of the Association of Councilors of Bolivia (ACOBOL), in order to group and organize all the councilors, former councilors, mayors and former mayors of the country in the perspective to defend their interests and political rights. Until then, the presence of women at the municipal level was not part of the public agenda of women in Bolivia, it was not part of the government agenda nor that of female or feminist social movements.²⁵

The operation and maintenance of ACOBOL is based on contributions that each municipality makes to the association system. It also has support from external organizations such as UN Women through projects that they present as an organization, becoming a national entity made up of the associations of the 9 departments. ACOBOL between the years 2000 and 2009, collected at the national level an average of 249 testimonies about different reported cases of harassment and political violence, giving an average of 28 cases per year. The most reported cases were due to:

- 1) pressure for the resignation of female councilors,
- 2) acts of sexual, physical and psychological violence as well as excess of authority against female councilors
- 3) impediment in the exercise of their functions and illegal occupation of the councilor's office,
- 4) illegal freezing of salaries,
- 5) discrimination and
- 6) defamation and slander.

In 12 years, 4,000 cases of harassment and political violence against women would have been received (Vice Presidency, 2013).

ACOLAPAZ

The Association of Councilors and Mayors of La Paz (ACOLAPAZ), is a departmental entity belonging to ACOBOL and a member of the Municipal Associative System (SAM), which was created with the purpose of being a space for articulation of Councilors and Mayors, in defense of the rights to political participation of women. Its objective is to represent and defend the rights and development of capacities associated with municipal public management, for the construction of municipal equity and the mission of promoting and promoting female political participation in decision-making spaces.

VAP: Violence and political harassment based on gender (Law 243)

The official record of the OEP Gender Observatory states that: of the total complaints received about harassment and political violence against women for 2018, at least 96% of them consist of actions of pressure, harassment, threats and physical violence, in addition to activating institutional practices such as the illegal freezing of salaries and suspension of social benefits. Provoking in women the feeling of insecurity and impunity in an area that they perceive is still carried out by men,²⁰ they maintain that one of the most marked manifestations of political harassment and violence against women occurs in male substitutes to female incumbents with the aim of making them abandon the position through a series of threats, intimidation, fear, harassment so that the ownership can be assumed by the substitute.

The shared management agreement. In terms of Lopez Rosel & Quisbert Carvajal,²⁰ it is a new concept that specifically refers to an internal agreement between regular and alternate assembly members to assume ownership of the mandate of their functions for similar periods and despite the fact that it is not regulation has become a

practice that refers to the resignation of the position due to pressure since compliance with said internal agreement is required so that a management can be carried out by incumbents and substitutes. In relation to our approach, between councilors it is a transactional agreement (written or verbal) that some sign/establish at the electoral stage with the person nominated as a substitute for the exercise of the council. It can be signed or established between men and women and vice versa. Below we will see data constructed by the Democratic Parity Observatory and the OEP at the national level.

According to these data, in Bolivia from 2016 to October 2021, 350 complaints due to VAP would have been reported. La Paz is the department that, according to Figure 1, has reported the most complaints in 2018, which is mid-management and may be related to the types of violence referred to by the reviewed authors who refer to pressure for their resignation and the agreements. of shared management, following the list of complaints and resignations according to the same source, 86 women have filed complaints for VAP in that management and 55 have submitted their resignation from the position in the same year and another 146 in the 2021 management, this management also records 19 cases reported by VAP and 6 resignations because of it according to Figure 2.

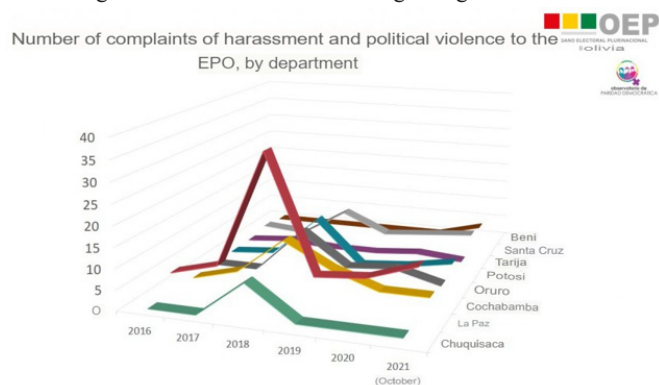


Figure 1 VAP complaints from female authorities by department.

Source: OEP Democratic Parity Observatory.

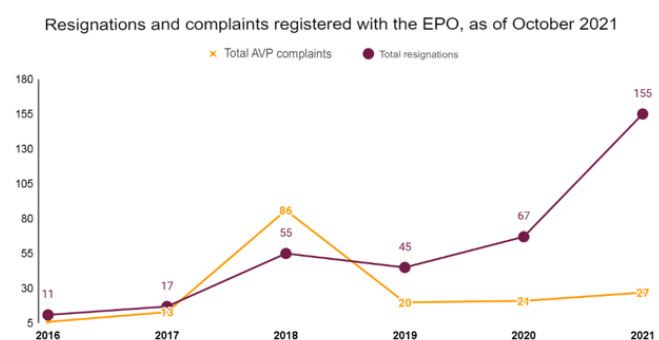


Figure 2 VAP complaints and resignations of female authorities at the national level.

Source: Own elaboration based on OEP, OPD complaints as of June 2021.

The predominant reason why during all these years they would have submitted their resignation has to do with family problems to which they would have referred. During the 2021 administration, they also refer to health problems that would be related to the Covid-19 situation in the country.

But if we talk about violence against men, this is culturally ridiculed due to the mandate of masculinity and is a reason why women continue

to be given public priority in issues of violence, leaving no room for the idea that a man can also be the victim, showing according to Rojas-Andrade, Galleguillos, Miranda, & Valencia²⁵ that the institutions that work on the gender issue do not escape the influences of patriarchal culture, keeping men silent, so as not to have to deal with ridicule. A more balanced view is found in Rodríguez Calva & Friaz,²³ who maintain that in politics, women also exercise violence against other women, which is known as intra-gender violence, but in a different way and in a lower proportion than that exercised by men. Men and despite the fact that the social representation is that of the man who generates discrimination and violence, both men and women produce and reproduce gender inequalities by resisting them. Vásquez¹⁹ complements this notion by stating that, “not only men exercise political harassment and violence, but it is also carried out by women who comply with orders, mandates and party slogans derived from the indiscriminate use and abuse of force and power.” power” (ibid: 29), confirming what is described later by Rodríguez Calva & Friaz²³ and Spedding²⁶ when they state that women’s participation in politics to cover quotas often makes it impossible for them to make decisions. own, which is related to the feeling of some women that is expressed in Vásquez¹⁹ stating that they feel that they are used as a political ladder weakening their participation, in our context this is favored with the signing of the so-called shared management agreement and agrees with what was proposed by Pär Zetterberg,²² about the need to carry out a more in-depth analysis of culture since the quota law does not solve the problem of women’s participation in politics.

In Bolivia, ACOBOL has contributed significantly to the analysis of gender-based political violence and harassment, focusing primarily on women, identifying as causes aspects related to gender roles, patriarchal culture, violence against women vs. what is known as shared management and the powers that the law confers on them at the time of exercising the position, in the case of councilors, one of the powers that according to the Political Constitution, the Framework Law of Autonomies and municipal regulations they have is the to supervise, one of the reasons why women are subject to harassment and political violence, but not only women can be victims because of exercising this power but also men, a fact that is cited by Rojas,²⁵ referring that the importance of the gender perspective has not been promoted in everyone, since gender is considered something exclusive to women and the community as a whole does not participate, which generates invisibility of half of the population in total issues. Importance, we consider that the author refers to men as the other half.

Juana Quispe de Ancoraimés case and trajectories of interviewed authorities

The police report that appeared in the Bolivian media reported the death of a woman from Ancoraimés whose body was found on the banks of the Orkojawira River with signs of strangulation on Tuesday, March 13, 2012. Juana Quispe Apaza, was the titular Councilor of the municipality of Anchors from the Omasuyos province representing the citizen group FSUTCLP-TK. She had problems from the beginning in the exercise of her position with the members of the Municipal Council and with the Mayor of said municipality. She also has to constantly and systematically face physical and verbal violence and threats from certain institutional, political and social actors and sectors. In a fair and legal determination, the Departmental Electoral Tribunal (TED) recognizes as valid, in all senses and contents, the constitutional protection claim filed by Juana in 2010, restoring all of her rights and guarantees as a regular councilor. However, the Autonomous Municipal Government of Ancoraimés did not reinstate her in her position. She continued her fight and filed a second amparo

action, the same one that came out in her favor at the end of 2011. However, they ended her life a few weeks later. As background, it should be noted that the complaints made by Juana for attacks against her safety and her life for more than two years were not heard. She had to face endless administrative and judicial processes and the permanent violation of her human rights and fundamental freedoms. The hearings called by the competent authority became veritable sieges of verbal and physical violence and threats against her.

It is known that on the day of her murder she went once again to the prosecutor’s office to report that she was being persecuted and to ask for guarantees for her life. She was prevented from exercising her public function as a counselor and her salary was withheld for almost two years, these were the minor “problems” that she had to face, if we compare them with the physical attacks to which she was subjected, such as throwing cement in her eyes, publicly insulting her and threatening her with death until her lifeless body was found. In the documentary review, it was found that what Juana Quispe Apaza stated from 2010 to the date of her murder was true, as corroborated by some social organizations, authorities and even the municipal police. There is also information that institutional and community authorities and representatives of certain social organizations not only denied her the right to exercise her functions but also tried and sentenced her without any evidence. More than a year after her murder, the case, although it has been prosecuted, is paralyzed and the people accused of being responsible for her murder are free. This situation results in the intellectual and material authors continuing with impunity.¹⁹

“Laws are only for women”: testimonies of VAP victims

The interview excerpts presented below recount the personal trajectories of former authorities interviewed, all of them use names and places different from their real ones, respecting their desire to keep their identity secret and are connected for the purpose of narrative practice only. Of those consulted, only one had previous experience in municipal public management and was aware of the challenges, responsibilities and prerogatives of his position.

From the group of interviewees, we identified various common statements that are accompanied by tears and strong expressions of pain and trauma:

“It is difficult (...) for me, but I have been with a psychologist for three months. Honestly, I tell you, I was lost, sister appeared in Viacha, and she appeared down here in Sopocachi. Things have happened in my life, last I thought about poisoning myself because what can I do was no longer me... Because I went out on the street I got lost, and the prosecutor also told me: you have to come personally.” (Former councilor interview, August 22, 2021).

“Until now I’m still being persecuted, I don’t know what I can stop him with. And that’s why some times I mean any time I can go out somewhere, so I can appear dead. That little while the law, not even the law will solve it. He’s going to say that I haven’t done anything, because I’m always haunted by the problem that they’ve done to me. So, honestly, so that nothing happens to me, that’s why I wanted to arrange for him to give me guarantees, but now he’s not giving me that either”... “The judges and prosecutors don’t do anything, that’s why I say like this, I’m not going to appear dead anymore.” ... There is Ancoraimés’ sister, as Juana has appeared, dead has appeared and now she has left her orphaned wawas”.

“You can easily fall into a depressive state and become schizophrenic. I couldn’t sleep until I did psychological treatment to sleep”

The experiences of having gone through VAP situations allow us to observe that they have caused in women who have held political office a deep feeling of insecurity due to the impunity that has been dealt with in previous cases, in addition to the constant trial of their charges in a terrain still dominated by men (observation record, October 2021). As mentioned by one of the participants, following the data on the status of the complaints, it is kept in mind that most of the complaints have not been successful, in terms of former councilor 28. (Interview data 11/01/2021). Reporting does not help to reduce the level of harassment or violence since this situation is revealed, which generates discomfort in those reported, further worsening their situation, especially with administrative officials who, for X reasons, often hinder the work of the complainants, refusing to provide or receive exoneration notes, claims or other procedures, leaving the complainants unable to generate any supporting document or charge to support their complaint.

With the men who have held council positions, despite the continuous refusal to respond to an interview or suspend it, we have managed to conduct some in-depth interviews that have allowed us to understand that the mandate of masculinity referred to by Segato is very strong in the majority of men who have been victims of VAP. After having managed to generate a level of trust with a former councilor interviewed, we obtained a reference from another former councilor who, like many women, suffered violence or political harassment and we consider that her case is relevant, for our benefit, after the interview he had to meet with that person, so we reached the other former councilor who at first was distrustful of answering our questions, initially stating that “if it is harassment and violence, the sisters report it to ACOLAPAZ.” The former councilor who referred us had to support us by asking his now friend to answer our questions since it could be useful. While I was convincing him, we could see that he was a medium-sized man, wearing a very damaged hat, his dry lips, dusty and very old shoes, he was carrying a backpack very discolored by the sun full of repairs, when he finally agreed, we managed to start collecting information about his case, during the interview when questioned about the way in which that he suffered violence, he became uncomfortable; He recounted his nervous story, averting his gaze and constantly looking at all sides as if someone were watching him, as he punctually described what he considered to be violence; He said that it is especially psychological, at several moments he passed his saliva with an obvious lump in his throat, his eyes became watery and at times he turned his head in the opposite direction to ours to surreptitiously wipe away his tears, “Maybe because I am from the countryside?” Or because I haven’t been able to finish school, will they treat me like that?” were some of his questions. The interviewee specifically; joined a complaint for withholding wages for more than 2 years of work, but despite having joined the complaint of her two female colleagues, the case had not prospered and, like the situation of her colleagues, her situation had worsened since after the complaint he felt the apathy, discomfort and annoyance of his colleagues, the mayor himself and even the administrative staff, who in response to the complaint alleged that he was not fulfilling his duties and that he had missed several council sessions. Harming the municipality, omitting that on many occasions they did not notify it in time for the council sessions. After the complaint, they notified him minutes before an extraordinary session without indicating that the mayor had decided to hold a session in a community surrounding the municipality.

The interviewee concluded by saying, “I just walk low on morale, it’s like I’ve been trampled on, I don’t wish on anyone the treatment they gave me and to make matters worse, they didn’t even pay me the

salary for which I now have to wander around the offices, presenting notes.” and notes, and it seems that they don’t work... my wife and my children scold me every time and with reason because I don’t send money, easy people talk after me as if I were a thief like that and that hurts”.

One of the men interviewed with a penetrating look and with furrowed eyebrows asks himself: “Is there a law for us or do we not feel?” Another of the interviewees says that he was never able to report anything since he lives in the same town and in its terms are a small town, a big hell. He remembers that once, together with his companions, he received blows from the original authorities who demanded his resignation so that the substitute councilors could take office, “that time I only said that I am going to report, I never did it, but since that time when passing by they murmur about me saying; jachawalla (crybaby in Aymara), thug, faggot and things like that, it’s for fighting, I prefer to lower my head, I just have to walk upside down”.

Another male former councilor says that getting into politics was a mistake that he greatly regrets since he was in office until now, people see him as corrupt, “people think that a politician is always corrupt, they always look for the negative, drunk people easily get me. They shout and I have to live with that for I don’t know how long, the worst thing is that my wife and my children listen and it’s as if they were saying more”.

The practice of politics is culturally linked to the processes of corruption, in the terms of a former leader of the Bartolinas “politics is filthy and to get in you have to know that, if you are already in then there is no turning back, you have to hold on and try.” to do things well”. Its practice has to do, for example, with the consumption of alcoholic beverages, the use of the image of the person who practices it as an object of attack, especially at times of elections, where competitors seek information that could damage the image of the other, but now in the exercise of office; The conflicts between elected authorities that come from different parties generate rivalry, the gender roles between men and women, the patriarchal system and the mandates of masculinity that aim to put men in supremacy over women in order to maintain their same masculine image. They have taken root as practices that leave bad experiences in those who have not been able to enter that current and move in it. The damaged social image that Goffman speaks of as stigma weighs on both men and women, culturally conceiving political practice as something negative and thus the idea that a person who enters politics is linked to corruption and uncondensed practices. But they have become normalized and are even known as cultural practices in our context.

But how does it affect the political participation of both men and women? One of the informants refers: “In my municipality, seeing that they (women) are losing prestige, they no longer want to be part of equal sharing, they are wanting to avoid it and there are very few women who want to assume that responsibility”. Women’s participation in municipal politics seems to depend on the experiences they have had during their administration in addition to the supportive family ties they have, since if they have the support of their family, especially husbands, they emotionally feel greater strength to continue learning as they themselves affirm, and after taking a break, continue a political career, although these statements are still a priori and still deserve to be analyzed.

In the case of men, the majority have expressed their desire not to continue in politics since they feel that they have made a mistake by venturing into that field and that they are not willing to repeat events

they have experienced. Family emotional support is also decisive in their cases since they recognize that if they were invited again or there was the possibility of returning to politics, they would do so with more experience but if they had family support, since their VAP experiences also affected their family. In both cases, when they manage to enter the circles that are being formed in their political environment, logically they also maintain the desire to continue participating in other areas and seeking better preparation.

Discussion and conclusions

Violence and harassment against women is a phenomenon that is deeply rooted in public life as an expression of its political culture. In that sense, as the intercultural parity democracy project suggests; This would be possible from the promotion of actions towards the change of practices and values that contribute to normalizing the presence of women as holders of political-public power, enabling their permanence and the conclusion of their mandate through affirmative action measures within the citizen groups and political parties, in addition to the promotion of specific laws to classify the dimensions of intersectional violence in politics; enabling the generation of public policies and regulations within the Plurinational State so that subnational levels implement equality and equity processes based on social justice and contribute to closing the existing inequality gaps between men and women.

Violence and political harassment express different categories of discrimination regarding gender, social class, ethnicity, and sexual orientation (not explored in this document). However, the number of VAP complaints from women is visibly higher than that from male complainants, we recognize in the testimony collected from them mandates of hegemonic masculinity and gender biases that interfere with the under-recording of the data and we highlight personal experiences from discriminatory treatment and psychological violence during his administration, which triggers consequences for his tenure in office and in relation to his future personal projects outside of politics; However, we highlight this as a peripheral phenomenon of the social problem.

For a decade in Bolivia, specific policies have been promoted to counteract expressions of violence in public and private spaces against women. In 2012, and in response to complaints from female authorities in different political decision-making spaces that have made visible frailties in the constitutional, judicial and administrative system in response to their demand for the exercise of civil and political rights, Law 243 against women was sanctioned and enacted in the country. Violence and Political Harassment of Women, however, to date this regulatory mechanism does not seem to have resolved this problem or operate efficiently in the face of complaints, from timely and adequate attention to the complainants, generating insecurity and vulnerability in the victims, forcing them to resign from office to cease hostilities; due, among other reasons, to the lack of economic resources, human personnel and the judicial burden on the system when a process is established in this way.

Using data collected by the Association of Councilors and Mayors of La Paz (ACOLAPAZ), a civil institution of the department that brings together municipal authorities from the 87 local governments, addressing cases of violence and political harassment and strengthening capacities for municipal public management; It was detected that this type of violation is frequently carried out among women within the Council. For this reason, this entity has recently proposed a route of attention in cases of violence and political harassment when both parties to the conflict are women, installing a space for dialogue

supported by an impartial third party from the ethics commission of the departmental Directorate; This route consists of the review of the complaint presented by the authority, the reserved and confidential interview with the parties (providing legal advice), the preparation of a technical report for the Board of Directors of ACOLAPAZ, the installation of the conciliation table at the request of the parties and the monitoring of the results acquired.¹

Of the 73 cases registered by ACOLAPAZ in the period 2015 – 2021, and with the objective of identifying male victims of VAP; Having worked with the 38 former councilors interviewed (29 women and 9 men), we conclude that it is necessary to open information and access to data on VAP, respecting all ethical criteria to avoid victimization among other consequences in the identification of complainants. In addition to its integration into a single database for consultation, exchange and cross-referencing of information from the institutions receiving the complaints, in addition to the creation of a protocol for attention and coding of cases. As Spedding warns, women are often seen as guests in politics (2021: 48) due to the “innate” responsibilities in care and social reproduction, in addition to the differences in the expression of skills necessary to exercise politics, regarding to men, such as oratory and leadership; These gaps of difference serve as personal impediments in the exercise of the position, at least in the first years until resorting to hired consultancies.

In relation to the development of a comparative analysis of cases of VAP, in a study group that includes male victims of VAP, it is concluded that: the state reactions and the different levels of government to care for the victim are insufficient, in addition to the neglect of the person’s mental health among primary care mechanisms; However, civil institutions of the Municipal Associative System (see footer) frequently deal with this responsibility; they do not have the human and economic resources available to represent the victim and their treatment for social reintegration and reparation, allocating their capacity technique to the generation of technical skills for municipal management and depersonalized advice with the aim of preventing future expressions of VAP. It is also noted that when faced with the demand for attention to cases of VAP in men, they are not able to formalize it first, for personal and collective reasons based on the stigma and mandates of masculinity that weigh on men in situations of violence and second, as a consequence of the first that they avoid approaching any of the institutions on their own initiative, because these would only be at the service of women.

In this debate, a controversy arises regarding the consideration of men as victims of VAP, since this crime is based on gender as a cause of violence; However, during this work the group of male victims of VAP was considered based on broader values of difference and social exclusion, such as level of education, ethnicity, rural residence and age; always valuing with difference the expressions of violence and political harassment in women, because as was shown in the course of the document, politics is a hostile and alien scenario for women and in which their performance is frequently valued under the expectation of an extended motherhood, demanding morality and adequate performance of their responsibilities at home and care.

This review and support of VAP cases has also allowed us to observe the particular manifestation of digitalization and use of technologies in the former authorities interviewed, however a precarious internet infrastructure in the country unlike our neighbors and with special difference coverage in dispersed areas vs. urban; the conditions of knowledge and use of digital of the observed population is an initiative to collect and portability of VAP evidence for the documentation of future processes.

Acknowledgments

None.

Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest related to the present work.

Funding

None.

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