Fostering Women's Representation in Local Democracy

A Qualitative Analysis of the Factors Surrounding Female Political Participation at a Mayor Office Level in Colombia

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Abstract

This study critically examines the gendered experiences of female political candidates running for mayoral offices in Colombia. It addresses the systemic exclusion women face in a patriarchal political system, compounded by economic constraints, political violence, and societal norms. Through seven qualitative interviews, the research identifies the strategies used by women to overcome these barriers. The factors surrounding their participation in local politics are grouped and analyzed under four main categories: identity, systemic and structural, social and behavioral factors. The participants' journeys are marked by political violence, gender-based violence, and systemic exclusion as significant barriers to accessing and exercising political power at the local level. Despite facing limited institutional support, many women leveraged personal networks and grassroots strategies to overcome financial and political challenges in their campaigns. The research reveals a pervasive gap between legal frameworks promoting gender equality and the reality of gendered obstacles, illustrating the need for stronger enforcement and support mechanisms.

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1. Introduction

On November 20th, 2019, amidst protests surrounding the right to abortion in the country, four members of the Chilean feminist collective 'LasTesis'[1] performed for the first time in Valparaíso the chant and the choreography of the song "Un violador en tu camino" (A Rapist in Your Path). With blunt language the song denounces violence against women condoned by the state. The act was originally meant to be a scene in a theatre piece, but the political context motivated its authors to transform it into a participative protest performance. What the collective didn't expect was that its chorus,[2] including the provocative phrase "the oppressive state is a male rapist" would be chanted in protests not only across the American continent – including Colombia –, but also in France, Spain, Germany, Lebanon, Turkey[3] and India[4], among others. It went through minor transformations to better adapt to the local context,[5] but it resonated with the same feeling of miscontent against governments who have failed not only to guarantee women's safety, but also to take these aggressions seriously and to prosecute these crimes.

When analyzing this movement, Martin and Saw also note that it "takes place within the context of other mass protests responding to the ascendancy of the 'new right' which in Latin America is informed by conservative elements of the church"[6] and where male-dominated cabinets have an exclusive say on women's public and private lives. This also raises the question as to how

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[1] The collective's members are Daffne Valdés, Sibila Sotomayor, Paula Cometa and Lea Cáceres. For this song they were inspired by the work of Argentinian anthropologist Rita Segato who theorizes femicides in Northern Mexico in the 2000s as a communicative process of impunity between state and para-state institutions and the population. (See Segato, R. (2014) "Las nuevas formas de la guerra y el cuerpo de las mujeres", University of Brasilia, https://doi.org/10.1590/S0102-69922014000200003)

[2] "The patriarchy is a judge / That judges us for being born / And our punishment / Is the violence you don't see … Is the violence you already see. It's femicide / Impunity for my killer / It's the disappearance / It's the rape… And it wasn't my fault, not where I was, nor how I dressed. The oppressive state is a male rapist." (my translation).

[3] In Turkey it was performed by female parliamentarians in the congress building, following the detention of seven women in Istanbul who also had performed the song.

[4] In India it was triggered by the brutal murder of a woman who was on her way to testify against her sexual abuser.

[5] The original performance has many references that are specific to a Chilean context: a blindfold referring to police violence in protest repression in 2018, squats said to be demanded from female prisoners after detention, the title alluding the song "A Friend Along your Path" sang by the police corps in Chile in the 90s, among others. See Montes, R., (2019). "'El violador eres tú', el himno que Chile exporta al mundo" El País. Recovered from https://elpais.com/sociedad/2019/12/07/actualidad/1575742572_306059.html# on February 28th, 2024.

[6] Martin, D., & Shaw, D. (2021). "Chilean and Transnational Performances of Disobedience: LasTesis and the Phenomenon of Un violador en tu camino." *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, *40*(5), 712 – 729. https://doi.org/10.1111/blar.13215

to better guarantee the human rights of women in a context where the rate of femicides is still alarming, and where pay and domestic labor gaps are still very wide.

But how is this to be linked with representation in local democracy? Rita Segato helps to better understand the dynamics between the state and women. While authors like Anne Philips and Iris Marion Young help understand what the democratic concern for representation is and the presence of women and minorities in public leadership roles.

In this context it is more important than ever to rethink the composition of governmental institutions and how they can be reformed in order to include women's voices and perspectives into legislative and representative bodies to ensure a more effective protection of the human rights of half of the global population.

In Colombia, the social reality is very similar to that of its neighboring countries. Despite having one of the most progressive legal frameworks for gender equality protection in the region and having ratified all the relevant international treaties and even transcribed them into national law, women and girls still face significant disadvantages when it comes to accessing their rights. Access to education and equal economic opportunities remain out of reach for women across the country, indexes of gender-based violence and child marriages decrease very slowly and the percentage of female lawmakers and representatives has stagnated despite the introduction of gender quotas at some government levels.

The Colombian Constitutional Court requires parties to have at least 30 percent female candidates in their electoral lists, but the lack of effective sanction mechanisms has allowed most parties to ignore this requirement without any significant consequences.[7] As a result the increase of public positions occupied by women hasn't risen to the desired levels. And if this is a problem in parliamentary assemblies, where there are several seats available; at a municipal level, where there is only one electoral post being disputed, it has meant that only 12% of the elected mayors are women.

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[7] Olivieri, S., Muller, M. (2019). "Gender Equality in Colombia: Country Gender Assessment" Washington, D.C., World Bank Group. Recovered from http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/665381560750095549/Gender-Equality-in-Colombia-Country-Gender-Assessment on March 1st, 2024. p. 12-19

The presence of not only women, but any marginalized group conforming a polity, in political institutions has been defended by authors like Iris Marion Young and Anne Philips. Young claims that the shared perspective of specific social groups is more effective for avoiding their social exclusion and marginalization, while Phillips thinks of 'the politics of presence' as contrasting the politics of ideas and insists on the importance of representation based on social characteristics like ethnicity or gender in political systems.

Purpose and Research Questions: Analyzing the obstacles and finding ways to surpass them.

"Women's rights are human rights."

This phrase, popularized by feminist movements in the 1980s[8], highlights both a truth and a gap. It affirms that women's rights are fundamental human rights, while also emphasizing the ongoing struggle to fully realize them. However, acknowledging this is just the first of many steps needed to achieve true gender equality.

Despite legislation promoting gender equality, its effectiveness remains limited at the local level. Nevertheless, some women, against all odds, manage to secure electoral victories. This makes it particularly important to investigate the factors influencing their success, the common challenges they face, and the strategies they employ to overcome these barriers. In other words, this thesis seeks to contribute to the understanding of the obstacles women encounter when seeking electoral positions at the local level in Colombia. The guiding research questions are as follows:

1) What are the main obstacles for women's political representation at a municipal level in Colombia?
2) Which elements, tools or characteristics have helped successful women candidates overcome these obstacles?

Seeking to adopt an intersectional perspective to this research, and considering context appropriate elements, the secondary questions guiding this study are:

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[8] Fester, G. (1994). Women's Rights Are Human Rights. *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity*, *20*, 76 – 79. https://doi.org/10.2307/4065874

a) How have inherent characteristics of the individuals influenced their access to political representation? (i.e. class, ethnicity, skin color, geographic origin)

b) How have the social characteristics of the individuals influenced their access to political representation? (i.e. class, clothing, accent, ties to past mayors, etc.)

c) How aware are women candidates of the institutional tools available to them and how effective are they?

2. Contextual Framework

This section aims to provide the reader with the necessary historical, legal, political and statistical information to understand the context in which the present research takes place. A general overview of gender equality in Colombia at a political, but also a societal level, is presented, as the country's socio-political landscape is significantly marked by over half a century of internal conflict, which has not only shaped its political dynamics but also entrenched societal divisions across various lines, including class, gender, and political allegiance.

Thus, the first section offers a brief overview of gender equality conditions in Colombia as delimited by international organisms in their latest reports, allowing readers to appreciate the complex backdrop against which Colombian political actors operate today. The second section offers an overview of the legal framework regarding the political participation of women in the country and focusing on the electoral mechanisms, which are especially linked to the resources available for women throughout their mandates and campaigns. The third section offers a statistical overview of women in mayoral positions in 2019 and 2023, which are the electoral periods the participants belong to. Lastly, a section is devoted to the analysis of relevant research of female political participation at a local level.

An Overview of Gender Equality in Colombia

Despite recent advances Colombia still faces several gender equality challenges permeating all levels of society. Some of these are persistent gender gaps, the impact of the pandemic – especially given the percentage of households who subsist within informal economy – , inadequate planning of gender policies, lack of vertical policy integration at all government levels, lack of awareness and implementation of existing gender tools, and last but not least, the impact that the internal conflict has had in the past decades, where different 'departamentos' – the regional administrative level in Colombia – (from now on referred to as departments) have been affected differently.

Persistent Gender Gaps and Gender Based Violence

Despite legal and policy advancements, Colombia continues to grapple with persistent gender gaps that hinder women's full participation in economic, public, and political life. These gaps are evident in the labour market, education, political representation, and other sectors, limiting

gender equality and economic growth.[9] High levels of gender-based violence persist, with inadequate legal protection for victims. This is compounded by challenges in accessing justice for women and gaps in the legal framework that fail to cover all forms of violence against women effectively.[10]

Societal Norms, Economic and Political Participation

The political violence against women aspiring to mayoral office is also the highest in the country[11], with 44.1% of all reported cases involving women candidates seeking mayoral positions. This is followed by 32.4% of the cases targeting women running for gubernatorial positions, indicating that those seeking high-ranking executive roles are disproportionately affected. In contrast, 14.7% of cases involve candidates for municipal or district councils, while only 5.9% of the incidents are related to women vying for positions in departmental assemblies. The lowest reported category is female public officials, who make up 2.9% of the victims. These results suggest that the level of violence intensifies with the prominence of the position women seek, particularly in executive roles like mayorships and governorships, reflecting the resistance and hostility faced by women as they strive for leadership positions in local governance.

Patriarchal norms and a male-dominated political culture limit women's participation in politics and decision-making roles. Political violence against women and the low representation of women in political and leadership positions highlight the need for societal change and stronger enforcement of legal quotas.[12] Societal norms continue to inhibit women's full participation in the labour market. This includes discrimination in hiring processes, wage disparities, and insufficient legal provisions for work-life balance, such as parental leave and

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[9] OECD (2020), "OECD Review of Gender Equality in Colombia", OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/b956ef57-en p.15

[10] Olivieri, S. D., Muller, M. (2019) "Gender Equality in Colombia: Country Gender Assessment". Washington, D.C.: World Bank Group. http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/665381560750095549/Gender-Equality-in-Colombia-Country-Gender-Assessment. p.10-11

[11] "El Observatorio de Violencia Contra las Mujeres en Política insta a reconocer las violencias ejercidas contra candidatas del país. Hechos, cifras y contextos de este fenómeno en la actual contienda electoral" Observatorio de la Violencia Contra las Mujeres en Política. Gráfica 1. p.3 Recovered from https://mujerpoliticasinviolencia.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Boletin-VF.pdf on October 6, 2024.

[12] ibid. p.18

childcare support.[13] The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities, disproportionately affecting women and girls. Women, being overrepresented in sectors most affected by the crisis and bearing the brunt of increased unpaid care work and facing heightened vulnerabilities.

Inadequate Strategic Planning for Gender Equality Policy, Need for a Whole-of-Government Approach and Usage of Government Tools

While Colombia has made strides in setting a vision for gender equality, there is a need for a standardized approach to implementing gender mainstreaming. This includes clear protocols, processes, and methodologies to integrate gender perspectives across national and subnational government levels.[14]

The competent bodies highlight how crucial it is to reinforce Colombia's institutional framework for gender equality. The fragmentation and limited capacity of institutions tasked with advancing gender equality hinder comprehensive and cohesive action. This includes challenges in coordinating policies and programs across different levels of government and ensuring that gender-focused institutions have the necessary resources and authority.[15] This involves enhancing the capacities of key bodies like the Presidential Council for Women's Equality (CPEM) and ensuring that gender considerations are incorporated into policy design and execution at all levels of government.[16]

According to the OECD, operational tools for promoting gender equality, such as gender impact assessments (GIAs) and gender budgeting, are underused. A systematic approach to these tools is suggested, such as collecting and utilizing gender-disaggregated data for informed policymaking.

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[13] Olivieri, S. D., Muller, M. (2019) "Gender Equality in Colombia: Country Gender Assessment". Washington, D.C.: World Bank Group. http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/665381560750095549/Gender-Equality-in-Colombia-Country-Gender-Assessment p.10-11

[14] OECD (2020), "OECD Review of Gender Equality in Colombia", OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/b956ef57-en p.19-64

[15] Olivieri, S. D., Muller, M. (2019) "Gender Equality in Colombia: Country Gender Assessment". Washington, D.C.: World Bank Group. http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/665381560750095549/Gender-Equality-in-Colombia-Country-Gender-Assessment p.12-14

[16] OECD (2020), "OECD Review of Gender Equality in Colombia", OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/b956ef57-en p.53-57

Regional Disparities and Conflict Impact

Women and ethnic minorities in current or historical conflict zones face distinct challenges, including violence and displacement. In rural areas women face additional barriers in accessing education, health services, and economic opportunities. The rural-urban divide is exacerbated by the legacy of armed conflict and traditional social norms that restrict women's rights and participation.[17]

Legal Framework for Gender Equality in Colombia

International Level

Colombia has ratified several key international treaties to promote gender equality and protect women's rights[18], including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1996 and the Belém Do Pará Convention to prevent, sanction, and eradicate violence against women in 2014. Additionally, Colombia is a signatory to major human rights treaties such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The country is also committed to global frameworks like the Beijing Platform for Action, the Millennium Development Goals, and the Sustainable Development Goals, all of which aim to advance gender equality. Moreover, Colombia is subject to the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court, which recognizes gender-based crimes as war crimes and crimes against humanity.[19]

Nonetheless, Colombia has yet to ratify the ILO Convention 156 on Equal Opportunities and Equal Treatment for Men and Women Workers, protecting workers with family responsibilities, and the ILO Convention 183 concerning the Revision of the Maternity Protection Convention (Revised), 1952. The former aims to promote policies that enable individuals with family responsibilities to engage in employment without facing discrimination, while the latter focuses on enhancing maternity protection in the workplace, including provisions for maternity leave, benefits, health protection, and breastfeeding

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[17] Olivieri, S. D., Muller, M. (2019) "Gender Equality in Colombia: Country Gender Assessment". Washington, D.C.: World Bank Group. http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/665381560750095549/Gender-Equality-in-Colombia-Country-Gender-Assessment p.61

[18] Ibid. p.11

[19] Olivieri, S. D., Muller, M. (2019) "Gender Equality in Colombia: Country Gender Assessment". Washington, D.C.: World Bank Group. http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/665381560750095549/Gender-Equality-in-Colombia-Country-Gender-Assessment

arrangements. These unratified conventions represent areas where Colombia could enhance its commitment to gender equality by aligning its policies with international standards, especially in terms of supporting the labour market participation of women with family responsibilities and safeguarding maternity rights.[20]

National Level

The national entities responsible for advancing gender equality include the Presidential Council for Women's Equality (Consejería Presidencial para la Equidad de la Mujer), which plays a pivotal role in planning, managing, and monitoring pro-equality public policies, as well as promoting research concerning women's status through partnerships with various sectors. This council operates under the Administrative Department of the Presidency and is tasked with integrating gender perspectives across public administration and ensuring the enforcement of gender equality laws.

Furthermore, the National Department for Planning and a myriad of other institutions at the national level, encompassing ministries, departments, and agencies, contribute to the implementation of gender policies. To facilitate coordination among these diverse actors, an Inter-sectoral Commission was established, aimed at overseeing the execution of the national gender plan. Despite the extensive institutional framework, challenges such as limited resources, coordination difficulties, and the need for more robust enforcement mechanisms persist, highlighting the ongoing efforts and complexities involved in promoting gender equality in Colombia.[21]

Electoral Justice in Colombia

Electoral Justice institutions also play an important role in ensuring the implementation of gender equality policies throughout democratic processes and is the main competent jurisdiction in political processes. The following summary is based Electoral Observation Mission in Colombia report on the matter.[22]

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[20] Ibid. p.82

[21] Ibid p.14

[22] Barrios Cabrera, A. et.al. (2019) Cuotas de Género y Justicia Electoral en Colombia. Misión de Observación Electoral p.16-24

The **National Electoral Council** (CNE) is competent to receive claims from citizens regarding decisions made by political party authorities that contravene the law, including those related to gender representation. Citizens have up to 20 days after such a decision to make a claim. The **Administrative Procedure and Administrative Litigation Code** (CPACA) outlines the primary rules of administrative litigation jurisdiction which protects and guarantees the rights and freedoms of individuals. It provides control mechanisms that citizens can use to ensure the legality of administrative decisions, including those related to gender representation in political candidate lists. The **nullity and restoration of rights action** allows for the challenging of CNE decisions if these violate the Constitution or the law, including the case of non-compliance with the legal gender quota. This action can serve as a tool for citizens to ensure fair gender representation in politics. The **nullity action** is a public action that defends legality and can be used to demand compliance with Statutory Law 1475 of 2011, related to the democratic formation of lists to be presented for popular election positions. This law includes specifications for gender quotas, making nullity action a potential recourse in cases of non-compliance.

The **Constitutional Court** has indicated that the constitutional tutela action can be used as a temporary mechanism to avoid an irremediable harm in relation to the fundamental right to elect and be elected, particularly in cases of non-compliance with the gender quota law. This underscores the importance of gender equality in the electoral process.

An Overview of Women's Political Participation and Representation after the 2023 elections

The last municipal elections in Colombia took place on the 29th of October 2023. According to numbers from UN Women Colombia[23], women constituted 51.4% of the electoral census for the 2023 elections. Female candidacies reached 39% of the total, marking an increase of 1.7% compared to 2019 and 2.4% compared to 2015. This gradual rise suggests a growing involvement of women in the political arena.

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[23] ONU Mujeres, et.al. (2023) "La participación política de las mujeres como candidatas en las elecciones de autoridades territoriales 2023" Recovered from https://colombia.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-10/boletin_inscripcion_mujeres._4_oct.pdf

However, challenges remain, particularly in positions without gender quotas. For mayoral and gubernatorial roles, women represent only 16% and 18.3% of the candidates respectively.

The landscape of female political representation presents a mixed picture. Some capital cities, including Bogotá, Barranquilla, Neiva, and Sincelejo, had no female candidates for mayor, indicating persistent barriers in urban political spheres. On the other hand, 51.5% of municipalities that elected female mayors in 2019 have women candidates in 2023, demonstrating a progressive increase in women's political engagement at the local level.

In terms of party lists, women conformed 21% of the lists for Departmental Assemblies and 27% for Municipal Councils. While these figures show improvement, they also underscore the ongoing need to push for greater female leadership within political parties. There is also the need to contextualize this number with the persistent phenomena of instrumentalization of women to "fill" the electoral lists.

Of the candidates from ethnic groups, 38.8% are women, with the highest representation among indigenous and Afro-Colombian populations. This intersection of gender and ethnic representation is crucial for ensuring a more inclusive political landscape.

Previous Research

An important percentage on studies in this field are devoted to the implementation and effectiveness of gender quotas, the incidence of political violence against women, and the efficacy of electoral justice mechanisms. Despite the abundance of studies in this sphere, there remains a scarcity of literature that focuses on the conditions that women aspiring to mayoral positions face. This gap is significant when compared to several seats available at a legislative or council level, the campaign process focuses more significantly on the individual. This differentiation is especially relevant when considering how corruption and clientelism further entangle the democratic scene, posing distinct challenges for women aiming for the mayoral office.

Despite the large number of research surrounding gender equality in representation in Colombia, few studies focus on mayors' roles specifically. So far, most studies have focused on providing an overview of different levels of local democracy, that operate within different legal frameworks and are subject to different circumstances than mayoral elections.

Gender Quotas

Gender quotas are the preferred institutional tool to increase women's political representation. Colombia implemented the Quota Law 581 of 2000 that stipulates that 30% of positions and bodies within the public power must be occupied by women. Additionally, the Statutory Law 1475 of 2011, Rules for the organization and functioning of parties, establishes that political party lists for popularly elected positions must be made up of 30% women, in cases where more than 5 seats are elected.[24]

Jaramillo Ruiz in his evaluation of the values and debates present in Colombia during the adoption of quota laws,[25] summarizes the quota constitutional experience. In 2000 with the enactment of Law 581, which aimed to ensure women's participation in public power. This groundbreaking legislation mandated a 30% quota for women in high-level public decision-making positions, requiring that 30% of ministries, departments, and government agencies be led by women. The law's scope extended beyond the public sector, promoting women's participation in the private sector and civil society through measures such as education on gender equality, leadership training for women, and information dissemination.

The law underwent scrutiny by Colombia's Constitutional Court, which validated most of its provisions while striking down others. This judicial review balanced principles of equality, merit, and effective participation. Notably, the Court upheld the quota for appointed positions but rejected it for elected offices - such as legislators and mayors -, emphasizing that quotas should not compromise the merit principle in public service. This decision highlighted the tension between affirmative action and the strong perception of meritocracy within Colombia's legal reasoning.

However, "In 2011, the Congress passed Law 1475. This law established a 30 % legislative candidate quota, provided monetary incentives for the pro-motion of women's participation (art. 17), and required educational measures for women's political empowerment (art. 18)."[26] Civil society actors and experts needed to be part of the legislation project this time, because

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[24] Misión de Observación Electoral (2022) "Reglas sobre la paridad de género" MOE. https://www.moe.org.co/en/calendario-electoral-qr-6/

[25] Jaramillo Ruiz, F. (2019). Colombia's Constitutional Debate on Gender Quotas: The Link between Representation, Merit, and Democracy. Desafíos, 31(1), 19 – 44. https://doi.org/10.12804/revistas.urosario.edu.co/desafios/a.6723

[26] Ibid. p.29

passing this legislation entailed changes to democratic practices. Mayoral offices are hence not covered by the quota provision and represented the government,[27] but they are only covered by inscription in party lists. As we will discuss this status entails problems when implementing and enforcing this practice.

Political Violence

Political violence is another important factor that surrounds gendered political participation, and which has increased significantly in the past year[28]. In a recent publication[29] Duque Salazar and Salazar Escalante researched political violence during the 2022 legislative elections. They focused on the identity of candidates who were more likely to report acts of electoral violence and included 702 candidates in their sample. Even though the focus of the study was not exclusive on gender, they found that women were more prone to suffer from sexual harassment throughout electoral campaigns than men. Factors like age were also relevant, and political affiliation and ethnicity were surprisingly less relevant. According to the authors this may be a sign that violence is used equally in politics by all groups, regardless of geographical region or political affiliation, contrary to the belief that left-wing candidates were more vulnerable.

The 2016 NIMD survey, involving 166 Colombian women who held elected office between 2012 and 2015[30], revealed that colleagues within the same governing body were the most frequently cited perpetrators of violence against women in multi-member organizations, as reported by 47% of respondents. Members of the same political party constituted 34% of the perpetrators for this group, often employing tactics such as pressure to support specific candidates or vote in predetermined ways. Public servants were identified as perpetrators by 32.9% of women in multi-member bodies, although the sources lack detailed information regarding the nature of these violent acts.

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[27] UN Women Colombia (2023) "La participación política de las mujeres como candidatas en las elecciones de autoridades territoriales 2023" Recovered from https://colombia.unwomen.org/es/stories/noticia/2023/10/la-participacion-politica-de-las-mujeres-como-candidatas-en-las-elecciones-de-autoridades-territoriales-2023 on September 24, 2024.

[28] Observatorio Político-Electoral de la Democracia (2024) La violencia contra líderes y lideresas políticas, sociales y comunales ¿Cómo terminó el 2023 y cuál es la situación de seguridad en los territorios? MOE p.4

[29] Duque Salazar, J. D., and Salazar Escalante, L. (2023). "Entre La Identidad Y La ideología: Factores De Riesgo De Violencia Electoral Para Las Candidaturas a Las Elecciones Legislativas Del 2022 En Colombia". Colombia Internacional, no. 116 (October): 133-72. https://doi.org/10.7440/colombiaint116.2023.05.

[30] Restrepo Sanín, J., Castro, A.P., and Osorio, D.M. (2016) "Mujeres y Participación Política en Colombia: el fenómeno de la Violencia contra las Mujeres en Política." Bogotá: Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy. p.43

Citizens were also found to be significant perpetrators, with 31.87% of women in multi-member bodies and 85.7% of female mayors reporting them as the source of violence. This violence often manifested as insults, threats, and the dissemination of false information through social media, messaging services, and local radio stations. Furthermore, 42.86% of female mayors experienced violence from community members, a category that might encompass influential figures like religious leaders or business owners. The report also highlights additional perpetrators, including contractors engaging in sexual harassment and police employing intimidation tactics.

Women candidates are also more prone to face, including physical, psychological, and sexual violence. It specifically highlights that women are not only at risk of physical harm but also disproportionately suffer from psychological and sexual forms of violence, which are often used as tools to intimidate, demean, and dissuade them from continuing their political campaigns.

Electoral Justice as a Tool for Political Gender Equality

As we have seen, despite existing legal frameworks aimed at ensuring gender quota compliance, the mechanisms within political parties and by electoral authorities, are often ineffective and procedurally unclear. The MOE found that an important element for structural change could be the Electoral Justice System (SJE), briefly outlined above.[31] Through a comprehensive methodological approach, they first analyzed the available institutions for electoral justice. Then, they proceeded to analyze decisions made by the CNE and the administrative jurisdiction to understand how gender quotas are interpreted and enforced, followed by a similar analysis applied to decisions of the SJE. They found that the later has an overlooked potential in influencing the success of gender quotas, noting that its impact on enforcing these quotas and, consequently, on enhancing women's political participation, remains insufficiently analyzed.

The analysis also reveals a significant underutilization of these mechanisms by women, suggesting a gap in awareness or accessibility to legal recourse for addressing quota violations.

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[31] Barrios Cabrera, A. et.al. (2019) Cuotas de Género y Justicia Electoral en Colombia. Misión de Observación Electoral

This is backed by findings by the OECD and the World Bank cited above and motivates one of the secondary research questions in this paper.

Another critical finding is the manipulative compliance with gender quotas by political parties, which typically fulfil quota requirements in a merely formalistic manner, thus undermining the substantive goal of increasing women's political representation. The Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy refers to this as the instrumentalization of women, creating harmful consequences for democratic institutions, and representing a type of gender specific corruption.[32]

The research concludes with recommendations for improving the SJE's support for gender quotas, including the need for clearer regulations, accessible judicial and administrative mechanisms, and targeted efforts to dismantle barriers impeding women's full political engagement and benefiting from gender quotas. This nuanced analysis highlights the complexities surrounding the implementation of gender quotas in Colombia, pointing to the necessity of stronger enforcement mechanisms and heightened awareness among women about their rights and the available means to assert them. These findings strengthen the relevance of the research question in the present study as to note how aware female mayors about the tools at their disposal are.

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[32] Garrido Otya M. et.al. (2021) "Candidaturas marginales y/o simbólicas como barrera para la participación efectiva de las mujeres" in "Corrupción desde un enfoque de género: tres casos de estudio que abordan esta relación". Transparencia por Colombia. Recovered from https://transparenciacolombia.org.co/wp-content/uploads/estudios-de-caso.pdf on April 28th, 2024. p.14-34

3. Theoretical Framework

Women, Violence, and the Role of the State

The introduction of this paper alluded already to the influence that the Argentinian anthropologist Rita Segato has in Latin America's feminist landscape. Her work on the systemic violence against women engrained in patriarchal societies has permeated a significant part of the 21st century gender studies. While her work does not focus specifically on institutional political dynamics, the patterns identified in her theory both explain and apply to the access of women into office.

In "The Elemental Structures of Violence" the author begins by reflecting on the definition of gender advances by the French feminist tradition of the second half of the 20th century, namely Françoise Hardy. In this tradition gender is understood as a status element and, consequently, it can be at the origin of a condition of alterity, as the Other, creating a hierarchical order.[33] However, a binary/biological conception of the world is at the core of this conception. Segato disagrees with this last element and, instead, understands gender as "an emanation of positions in an abstract structure of relations set by human experience accumulated over a very long time, which merges with the phylogenetic time of the species".[34] Meaning that gender emerges from the roles and interactions throughout generations to the point that it can be compared to evolutionary patterns rooted in our collective human experience. Cognitive perceptions then become empirical realities that create a hierarchical order where certain groups become the oppressor or the oppressed.

According to Segato this hierarchical order is maintained through physical and moral violence, with moral violence playing a more important role. Moral violence "encompasses all that involves emotional aggression, even if it is neither conscious nor deliberate."[35] It is the 'argamasa', term coined by Segato to explain the element that holds the hierarchy in place and relegates the different actors into their roles.

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[33] Segato, R. (2003). "La argamasa jerárquica: violencia moral, reproducción del mundo y la eficacia simbólica del derecho" in *Las estructuras elementales de la violencia. Ensayos sobre género entre la antropología, el psicoanálisis y los derechos humanos*. Prometeo Libros. http://repositorio.ciem.ucr.ac.cr/jspui/handle/123456789/156 p.57

[34] Ibid. p.57

[35] P.115 (my translation)

Consequently, moral violence constitutes the most effective social control and inequality reproduction mechanism because of three reasons "1) its massive dissemination in society, which ensures its 'naturalization' as part of behaviors considered 'normal' and trivial; 2) its roots in religious and familial moral values, which allows for its justification; and 3) the lack of names or other forms of designation and identification of the behavior, resulting in the near impossibility of pointing it out and denouncing it, thus preventing its victims from defending themselves and seeking help." [36] According to her, the modern societies are ruled by "a violent normality, which depends on the daily demoralization of the marginalized."[37]

Even if Segato doesn't speak of these patterns explicitly in the political field, there is no reason to believe that institutions operated by individuals forming part of such societies would be exempted of these patterns. After all, as outlined previously, the MOE has identified extremely high percentages of violence against female candidates. A system that is so deeply permeated by this visible and invisible violence will pose many obstacles to those individuals in the oppressed groups that may seek to access spaces where they are not 'meant to be', such as decision-making bodies, leadership roles and public institutions. This applies to gender but also to race, ethnicity, religion, nation and class, but not separately. All these fields "are threaded by a single thread that passes through and links them in a single articulated scale as an integrated system of powers" and "interpenetrate in a social composition of extreme complexity. From top to bottom, the common language that keeps the structure standing is the subtle dialect of moral violence."[38]

In this context, what the author describes as the *symbolic efficacy of the law*[39] becomes crucial. She argues that law has the capacity to shape a reality that doesn't yet exist. Nevertheless, for this to occur it should be driven by an ethical sensitivity to challenge and reform the violent patriarchal morality prevalent in society. In this logic, the law, through its symbolic effectiveness, can reshape social realities by renaming and redefining concepts, thereby mobilizing political support and encouraging new understandings. The importance of representation in legislative institutions can be further understood through the works of Iris Marion Young and Anne Philips.

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[36] Ibid. p.115 (my translation)
[37] Ibid. p.121 (my translation)
[38] Ibid. p.121 (my translation)
[39] Ibid. p. 107-130

Lawfare

Another concept that is important to explore for the further understanding of the political landscape in Colombia is "Lawfare" or "legal warfare," which is a strategy employed to undermine political opponents, especially progressive movements, through legal channels. An article published earlier this year by the National University of Colombia[40] identifies that Lawfare has been utilized in Latin American countries such as Brazil, Ecuador, Argentina, and Bolivia to weaken state institutions, typically targeting political figures at three crucial stages: before elections, during their tenure in office, and after their terms conclude. Notable examples include the cases against Lula da Silva in Brazil and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner in Argentina.

In Colombia, there are growing concerns about the potential use of lawfare against progressive candidates in the upcoming 2026 presidential election. Lawfare can involve various state control bodies, including the Attorney General's Office and disciplinary, electoral, or fiscal entities. This practice is viewed as a threat to democracy, potentially stifling diverse political expressions and enabling state capture by economic and political elites. According to the author, the continued use of lawfare could significantly hinder the implementation of social welfare policies and undermine political participation.

Gender Equal Political Representation as a Legitimate Democratic Concern

The two main theorists of the 21st century exploring political representation as a necessity for legitimate democracy are undoubtedly Anne Phillips and Iris Marion Young. Both respond to critics who argue that putting too much emphasis on the identity of the representatives will result on identity politics that will further divide society

To Young, the element of a shared social perspective, in combination with a continued communicative process between the represented and the representative keeps the legitimacy of the representation updated. This idea emphasized the importance of citizen participation and of civil organization's actions for a healthy democracy.[41] Furthermore, inclusive democracy

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[40] Trujillo Osorio, O.J. (2024) "*Lawfare* o "guerra jurídica", el progresismo sobre los estrados judiciales" Periódico UNAL. Recovered from https://periodico.unal.edu.co/articulos/lawfare-o-guerra-juridica-el-progresismo-sobre-los-estrados-judiciales on October 5, 2024.

[41] Young, I. (2002). "Inclusion and Democracy". Oxford; online edn, Oxford Academic, November 1, 2003. https://doi.org/10.1093/0198297556.001.0001 p.121-153

goes beyond providing formal equality for all to participate in the political process; it requires special measures to address social and economic inequalities within unjust social structures. These measures may involve group representation to ensure that the unique social perspective of group members is heard.[42]

According to Young, women's exclusion from public debate stems from their historically lower social standing within patriarchal societies.[43] This diminished social standing, characterized by limited rights, opportunities, and access to power, translates into reduced political influence and under-representation. Societal biases and power imbalances, deeply embedded in social structures, hinder women's participation in politics, leading to the marginalization of their perspectives. Even as formal barriers to participation are removed, the enduring legacy of patriarchal norms continues to obstruct women's equal access to leadership positions and political influence. This exclusion results in public debate being dominated by perspectives that do not reflect the experiences and concerns of women, ultimately perpetuating inequalities and hindering the development of just and effective policies. Young argues that this structural inequality also contributes to political inequality and relative exclusion from influential political discussions for other marginalized groups, such as poor and working-class individuals.

To Young, the element of a shared social perspective, in combination with a continued communicative process between the represented and the representative, keeps the legitimacy of the representation updated. This idea emphasized the importance of citizen participation and of civil organization's actions for a healthy democracy.[44] Furthermore, inclusive democracy goes beyond providing formal equality for all to participate in the political process; it requires special measures to address social and economic inequalities within unjust social structures. These measures may involve group representation to ensure that the unique social perspective of group members is heard. However, Young warns that policies for the special representation of groups can inadvertently re-create exclusions. She critiques the tendency of such policies to assume a homogeneity of experiences within a group – such as women, African Americans, or

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[42] Phillips, A. (1998). "The Politics of Presence". Oxford; online edn, Oxford Academic, November 1, 2003. https://doi-org.ezproxy.its.uu.se/10.1093/0198294158.001.0001 p.27-53
[43] Young (2002) p.142
[44] Ibid. p.128

Deaf people – which is often false. Differences of race, class, and religion intersect and create a diversity of perspectives that cannot be neatly captured by a single representative identity. [45]

According to Young, representation should not be viewed as a static relationship where the representative merely stands for the represented. Instead, drawing from Derrida's concept of *différance*, she conceptualizes representation as a process of differentiation, where political actors maintain their plurality without being reduced to a unified identity. This approach acknowledges that true democratic decision-making in mass societies must go beyond the idea of co-presence or direct identity between representatives and those they represent.[46] Rather than focusing on a logic of identity, Young sees representation as a differentiated and mediated relationship between constituents and representatives, (authorization and accountability) which evolves through ongoing communication and shared dialogue. This understanding dissolves the paradox of identity in representation and allows for a more fluid approach to democratic participation, where representatives are not merely substitutes for a unified will of the people but are engaged in dynamic and differentiated relationships with their constituents.[47]

Similarly, Anne Philips understanding of the continuous process of politics as a process oscillating between politics and ideas. For her the gender or ethnic composition of elected assemblies becomes a legitimate democratic concern, claiming that institutions based on ideal politics of equal access to representation are not enough to address systemic inequalities. These systems are guided by a tendency for homogenization that sought to eliminate class differences in the wake of social democratic movements.[48] However, elements like skin color are gender are hardly characteristics that individuals can or wish to change, contrary to class. To her, a compromise between ideal politics and politics of presence needs to be reached to protect the human rights of women and other underrepresented groups.

Phillips dedicates the third chapter in "The Politics of Presence" to evaluate the arguments advocating for the presence of women in government institutions through a system of quotas. She identifies four main arguments in the political discourse. The first one concerns the argument of women in office being important role models for younger women. While she

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[45] Ibid. p.122
[46] Ibid. p.128
[47] Ibid. p.126
[48] Phillips, A. (1998). "The Politics of Presence". Oxford; online edn, Oxford Academic, November 1, 2003. https://doi-org.ezproxy.its.uu.se/10.1093/0198294158.001.0001 p.27-53

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admits that this is beneficial for more women to seek a political career, this argument risks treating political office as merely another profession (doctors, engineers, lawyers, etc.). Hence failing to establish representation of specific groups as a democratic concern.[49] Moreover, Young's focus on representing the diverse social perspectives that arise from individuals' positioning within social structures, may be an answer to the democratic legitimacy of this argument. These perspectives, shaped by lived experiences and social locations, offer distinct understandings of social issues that are crucial for informed policymaking.

The second argument for representation identified by Philips is justice. Framing it as an issue of fairness, the dominance of men in political representation is 'patently and grotesquely unfair,' suggesting that if the barriers preventing women from entering politics were removed, representation would be randomly distributed between the sexes. Any deviation from this would indicate structural discrimination. This argument, Phillips notes, is rooted in a feminist critique of the sexual division of labor. To argue for gender parity on the grounds of justice, one must first accept that the division of labor between the sexes is both inequitable and "unnatural." Hence, it could be argued that women often assume more caregiving roles naturally leading to fewer women in politics. Since this perspective relies on accepting the existing gender roles, it offers an incomplete justification for gender quotas. Phillips contends that true justice requires tackling structural discrimination, not just overt exclusion, and this provides a more robust foundation for advocating for gender parity.[50]

Thirdly, it is argued that women, due to their unique experiences, have specific interests that men are less likely to represent, such as policies on childcare, equal pay, and sexual harassment. However, Phillips critiques this argument by pointing out that women's interests are not homogeneous; there is considerable diversity and disagreement among women on many issues, undermining the notion of a unified 'women's interest.' She also notes that women elected to office are often bound to their parties' platforms rather than a collective women's agenda, given that elections are often organized by geographical constituencies and not by gender. This makes it unlikely that increasing the number of women in office will automatically lead to better

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[49] Ibid. p.63-67

[50] Phillips, A. (1998). "The Politics of Presence". Oxford; online edn, Oxford Academic, November 1, 2003. https://doi-org.ezproxy.its.uu.se/10.1093/0198294158.001.0001 p.67-71

representation of women's interests, leading Phillips to conclude that the argument from interest, while plausible, is ultimately limited.[51]

The final argument is that women, because of their roles in society, will bring new values and behaviors to politics. This perspective holds that women tend to be more cooperative, caring, and focused on social welfare issues, which could enhance the quality of political decision-making and challenge the competitive, interest-based nature of modern politics. In contemporary times, this view has been revived in eco-feminism and the "politics of care" found in the Nordic political tradition, where women are seen as particularly suited to advocating for environmental protection, social welfare, and peace.[52]

Gender Quotas

Gender quotas are one of the most popular mechanisms for fostering women's participation. Franceschet, Krook, and Piscopo examine how gender quotas have influenced women's political representation through comparing a series of studies across different regions in the world with a focus on descriptive and substantive. This study provides a theorization of the nature and impact of gender quotas, categorized into three types: reserved seats, party quotas, and legislative quotas. These mechanisms are used to increase the number of women in politics, yet their effectiveness varies depending on the context and the type of quota implemented.[53]

Descriptive quotas primarily seek to boost the numerical representation of women in political institutions. In Latin America, legislative quotas have been the most prevalent and were widely adopted in the 1990s. However, the mere increase in women's presence does not necessarily lead to greater influence in the decision-making process. Descriptive quotas focus on achieving gender parity, yet questions arise regarding whether this form of representation translates into meaningful policy changes and prioritization of women's issues.[54] This paper is only focusing on the later type of representation.

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[51] Ibid. p.72-77

[52] Ibid. p.78-84

[53] Franceschet, S., Krook M.L., and Piscopo, J.M., (2012), 2Conceptualizing the Impact of Gender Quotas", in Franceschet, S., Krook M.L., and Piscopo, J.M., (eds), *The Impact of Gender Quotas*, https://doi-org.ezproxy.its.uu.se/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199830091.003.0001 p.10

[54] Ibid. p.11

Substantive quotas, on the other hand, aim to ensure that women's interests and issues are adequately represented in the policymaking process. This type of representation goes beyond increasing the number of women in politics and seeks to empower female legislators to advocate for gender-equitable policies. In Latin America, the impact of substantive quotas has been mixed. While the presence of more women in legislatures has led to a greater emphasis on issues such as reproductive rights, childcare, and anti-violence laws, the extent of policy change varies significantly between countries. For instance, in Brazil, despite an increase in the number of female legislators, substantive representation has been hindered by persistent stereotypes and structural barriers that limit their influence. Women elected through quotas are often marginalized within legislative processes, assigned to less prestigious committees, and their proposals face higher rates of rejection. In contrast, Argentina initially saw a rise in women-focused policies following the implementation of quotas, but as the proportion of women increased, male legislators became more resistant, sometimes undermining the impact of these initiatives.[55]

The overall impact of gender quotas in Latin America reveals both successes and limitations. On one hand, Latin America has become one of the regions with the highest proportion of women in national legislatures globally, a testament to the effectiveness of descriptive quotas in increasing women's visibility. On the other hand, the impact on substantive representation has been less straightforward. While more women are entering politics, they often encounter significant challenges in advancing gender-equitable policies due to deeply rooted patriarchal norms and a political culture that prioritizes party loyalty over gender-based advocacy. This suggests that the success of substantive representation depends not just on increasing the number of women in legislatures, but also on creating a supportive environment that enables them to act as effective representatives for gender equity.[56]

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[55] Ibid p.16-18
[56] Ibid. p.20

4. Method and Material: Ethics in Development Context, Qualitative Research and Quality of Material

Ethical Considerations Decolonial Methodologies

Development research has often been criticized for perpetuating extractive practices that primarily benefit researchers from the Global North. One approach to mitigating these power imbalances is to involve participants in the research design process.[57] With this purpose, I sought to engage Colombian stakeholders as much as possible during the planning phase of this study. Specifically, I collaborated closely with the mentoring NGO the Colombian Federation of Municipalities (FCM), consulting them on the relevance and appropriateness of the research questions. Additionally, we discussed the level of anonymity that should be provided to participants, including which demographic or geographic details could be disclosed and which should remain confidential. These discussions also helped identify informal electoral practices that, due to their sensitivity, required careful framing to ensure participant safety and comfort.

Feminist-Historicist Remarks

It is essential to acknowledge that women's political agency in Colombia did not begin with the official right to vote or the implementation of the quota law. Throughout history, Colombian women have played critical roles in shaping local politics and resisting oppressive structures long before they gained formal political rights. For instance, during the Spanish colonization, figures like the Yalcón chief "La Cacica Gaitana"[58] and Polonia, the Afro-

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[57] Hammett, D., Twyman, C., & Graham, M. (2014). "Research and Fieldwork in Development" (1st ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203649107 p.22

[58] La Cacica Gaitana was a leader of the Yalcón people in the region of Cauca, Colombia. She is said to have led a resistance war against the Spanish conqueror Pedro de Añasco after the brutal murder of her son. The Yalcón are also a matrilineal society, where male leaders accessed power through their mother's lineage. See Matallana Peláez, S. E. (2016) "Desvelando a la Gaitana", La Manzana de la Discordia, 7(1), pp. 7 – 21. doi: 10.25100/lamanzanadeladiscordia.v7i1.1569 and Mächler Tobar, E. (2014) "La Gaitana: preludio a una biografía a la espera." América. Accessed on February 26th, 2024. https://doi.org/10.4000/america.226

Colombian *palenquera*[59], are just two among many who led organized resistance movements. Later, prominent figures such as Manuela Beltrán, Policarpa Salavarrieta ("La Pola"), spy during the independence war, and labor leaders like Felicita Campos, María Cano, and Betsabé Espinal mobilized people for social and political causes that were undeniably political in nature. Finally, Esmeralda Arboleda became the first woman elected to the Colombian Senate, marking a significant milestone for women's formal political participation.[60]

Although this research focuses on a more recent timeframe beginning with the implementation of the quota law, it is crucial to situate it within this broader historical continuum to emphasize that Colombian women's political agency has deep roots. Despite their long history of activism and leadership, women continue to face more barriers than men in accessing public office and decision-making positions, contributing to their ongoing underrepresentation in politics. For this reason, this study focuses on women who have attempted, successfully or not, to obtain local mayoral positions, documenting their experiences as they navigate the complex landscape of local politics. Whether they have broken the glass ceiling or are still striving to do so, these women's stories provide valuable insights into the obstacles they face and the strategies they employ in their pursuit of political office.

The Place of the Researcher

As mentioned, this paper adopts a postcolonial methodology to address its research question. Scholars within this field generally emphasize the importance of reflecting on the researcher's positionality within the social structure and context. This transparency is crucial for informing the reader about the perspective from which the research was conceptualized, planned, conducted, and finalized, as well as for understanding how the attitudes and perceptions of participants and other stakeholders may have shaped the research process.

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[59] Polonia is thought to have succeeded in leading 250 plantation enslaved workers (of whom 150 were women) and obtaining land and freedom from Spanish captain Ordóñez de Ceballos. See Friedemann, N., Espinosa Arango, S., (1995) "Las mujeres negras en la historia de Colombia", in: Las mujeres en la historia de Colombia. Tomo II. Consejería Presidencial para la Política Social; Norma, Bogotá p. 56 and Solano, Y., (2007) "Participación de las mujeres en la construcción social del territorio y el proceso de regionalización del Caribe colombiano" Territorios, (16-17). p.75 Recovered from https://revistas.urosario.edu.co/index.php/territorios/article/view/846

[60] For a complete analysis see Velázquez Toro, M., et.al. (1995) "Las mujeres en la historia de Colombia". Volumes I & II. Consejería Presidencial para la Política Social; Norma, Bogotá

In this context, it is essential to consider how my own identity influenced the dynamics surrounding the research. I am a white Mexican woman who has spent the past eight years in France and Sweden and conducted this study in collaboration with a Swedish university and a Swedish international cooperation agency. In Latin America, whiteness carries the legacy of colonial power structures, which often translate into social and economic advantages. Additionally, Mexico's complex political dynamics with Colombia, influenced by the U.S.A.'s stance on migration and the war on drugs, create a tense and ambiguous relationship between the two countries. These elements, along with the perceived prestige of European affiliations, may have positioned me in a place of relative power during fieldwork and data collection. However, the fact that all my participants were members of a local 'elite' – local leaders with established influence – helped to balance the power dynamic, as I was an outsider, younger, and less familiar with local contexts.

Regarding gender, my identity as a latino woman appeared to inspire a sense of trust among participants, contributing positively to the research process. However, it is important to note that gender dynamics operate differently across Latin America, and this trust may have been influenced by broader sociocultural perceptions of gender roles.

The shared colonial history between Mexico and Colombia also fostered a sense of familiarity, which helped build rapport with participants. Although the two countries differ significantly in their current political landscapes, shared cultural characteristics, such as a reputation for openness and warmth, created an environment conducive to informal support. For example, during a brief, self-funded excursion, I met a woman who, after learning about my research, connected me to two female mayors in her home department. Another woman I encountered under similar circumstances helped facilitate two more interviews. These chance encounters accounted for a third of the total material collected for this thesis, and more than half of the coded material, underscoring the importance of informal networks and cultural familiarity in the research process.

Finally, Spanish being my mother tongue, the interviews were carried out without the need of an interpreter or translator, which allows for more nuances and depth in the results. Additionally, regional language differences often motivated the participants to further clarify what they meant.

Methodological Choices and Justification

Semi-structured Interviews

Interviews are a widely preferred method of data collection in social science, especially when other approaches are inadequate for exploring a particular subject. [61] This study is one such case, as it focuses on understanding participants' perceptions and experiences within a specific context. Given the emphasis on capturing the nuanced obstacles faced by women attempting to access public office in local democracies, interviews are the most suitable method for gathering in-depth insights. Furthermore, the well-documented gap between the *de jure* (legal) framework and the *de facto* (actual) reality of gender equality in Colombia means that institutional data is relatively limited to address the research question effectively. Moreover, detailed interviews into how the experiences lived affected and motivated the subjects is more likely to shed light in the emotional, psychological and social aspects of this phenomenon.

Design of the Interviews and Selection of the Participants

Selection of Participants

The choice of focusing on women mayors in Colombia is due to the exceptionally difficult position for them to run for office compared to other women in local politics due to several interrelated factors. The absence of gender quotas outside of party lists in mayoral campaigns, unlike other local political roles, results in significantly lower female representation, with only 16% of mayoral candidates in Colombia's 2023 elections being women.[62] The highly competitive nature of mayoral positions requires substantial financial resources and support, which women often struggle to secure. Traditional, masculine political structures, especially in smaller municipalities, create an inhospitable environment for female candidates.

Women also face additional cultural and societal barriers, such as balancing family responsibilities with political careers and overcoming gender stereotypes. Political parties often provide insufficient support for female mayoral candidates, leaving them to navigate complex

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[61] Foddy, W. H. (1993). "Constructing questions for interviews and questionnaires: theory and practice in social research." Cambridge University Press. p.1

[62] ONU Mujeres, et.al. (2023) "La participación política de las mujeres como candidatas en las elecciones de autoridades territoriales 2023" Recovered from https://colombia.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-10/boletin_inscripcion_mujeres._4_oct.pdf on September 23, 2024.

campaign processes independently. Moreover, female candidates running for mayor may face higher levels of political violence, threats, and intimidation compared to other local political roles. These combined factors make it particularly challenging for women to run for and win mayoral positions compared to other roles in local politics. Successful mayors and candidates are therefore an interesting actor in breaking the glass ceiling that women face in this context.

The research participants were selected from three main groups: elected mayors who campaigned in the local elections of 2019 or 2023, unsuccessful candidates who campaigned during the same periods, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working to involve women in local politics.

To address potential survivor bias, the original research plan aimed to conduct 10 interviews with unsuccessful female candidates. This approach would allow for a comparison of electoral experiences, potentially revealing insights that successful candidates might not be aware of due to social privileges related to class or ethnicity. However, contacting unsuccessful candidates proved challenging due to a lack of official records and contact details. Consequently, only two interviews of this type were conducted. It's worth noting that many successful candidates had previously been unsuccessful, allowing for discussions about the differences between failed and successful attempts within the same interview.

Additionally, three interviews were conducted with key informants, who are individuals that work in civil associations or research institutes working directly to involve women in local politics. While the original research design aimed for ten such interviews, low response rates, time constraints, and logistical issues led to a significant decrease in this number. Despite this limitation, these interviews provided valuable insights: They complemented and enriched the qualitative information found in reports by state, civil society, and research organizations. They also offered a contemporary overview of gender equality and local democracy in Colombia, helped identify tools available for women in politics, provided important direction for the interviews with mayoral participants and served as a significant pillar in the later stages of the research design.

Finally, ten mayors belonging to afro-descendent, LGBTQI+, and indigenous communities were contacted through public contact details with the goal to include as many perspectives as possible, but none of them replied. The mentor NGO explained that these women are very

notorious and tend to have a busier agenda than other mayors. This research recognizes the need to include this perspectives and experiences in future research

Designing the Questions

The interview questions were designed to capture participants' experiences across different stages: before the campaign, during the campaign, and throughout their mandate and time in office. According to Foddy, common pitfalls in question design include participant misunderstandings, reluctance to share truthful responses, memory lapses, and interviewer bias.[63] To mitigate these issues, I prioritized using open-ended questions, as they tend to generate more detailed and genuine answers, enabling participants to share their perspectives freely and reducing the likelihood of misinterpretation.

Primary Material: Interviews with women involved in local politics.

The interviews contain five segments. The first three segments were equal for all the participants and acted as the initial steps in understanding the participant's background and journey into local politics.

Segment 1, comprising opening questions, delves into the participant's early involvement in local politics, exploring the timing, motivations, and initial experiences that led them to enter the political arena. Subsequently, Segment 2 focuses on the participant's path to seeking electoral office, probing their expectations and experiences during the election process, including encounters with obstacles and strategies employed to overcome them. These segments provide important background for a better analysis of the participant's political journey, providing valuable insights into their motivations, experiences, and perceptions within the local political landscape. Subsequently the interviews will vary slightly depending on the participants' group. The complete interview questions can be found on Annex 1.

Mayors 2019-2023 (P1)

Segment 2.1 serves as a transition from the election process to the participant's experience in office during the specified period (P1), aiming to understand their expectations upon assuming the mayoral role and comparing these to the realities encountered. Segment 3a focuses on the

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[63] Foddy, W. H. (1993). Constructing questions for interviews and questionnaires: theory and practice in social research. Cambridge University Press.

participant's experiences while serving as mayor during P1, probing obstacles faced, such as economic, personal, environmental, political, and social challenges, and strategies employed to overcome them, along with valuable support networks. Subsequently, segment 4a explores the participant's experiences and reflections after leaving office, examining whether their expectations were met, their continued political activity, and any future plans regarding potential involvement in public office, providing a comprehensive understanding of their political journey beyond their mayoral term.

Mayors 2023-2027 (P2)

Interviews with mayors in the second electoral period will go directly from Segment 2 to Segment 5, but the last question of segment 2 leaves the door open for any information that the participant considers relevant to share.

Unsuccessful Candidates

Segment 3b of the interview guide focuses on candidates who were unsuccessful in securing electoral victory, aiming to understand their post-election experiences and reflections. The segment explores reasons for their unsuccessful campaigns and identifies potential factors that could have enhanced their chances of success. Additionally, it investigates whether these candidates experienced significant lifestyle changes after the elections and whether they remain politically active.

Demographic Data

Segment 5 of the interview guide focuses on gathering demographic data from the participant. This segment aims to provide contextual information about the interviewee's background, including their age range, ethnicity, and social class. By collecting this demographic information, the interviewer can better understand the diversity and backgrounds of the participants involved in the study. Additionally, this data may help identify any patterns or trends in political engagement across different demographic groups. Ethnicity and class are open questions, and not restricted option boxes, allowing the participant to self-determine determine these characteristics more freely.

Elected Mayors		Unsuccessful Candidates
2019-2023 (P1)	**2023-2027 (P2)**	**2019 (C1) 2023 (C2)**
Segment 1		
Segment 2		
Segment 2.1	-	-

Segment 3a	-	Segment 3b
Segment 4a	-	-
Segment 5		

<div align="right">Table 1</div>

For this study, a total of twelve interviews with key informants and with women involved in local politics were conducted. Nine of them were with successful and unsuccessful mayor candidates during the 2019 and 2023 elections. Elements such as the region they come from or the party they campaigned with to is not specified in order to protect the anonymity of the participants, as advised by the mentor organization and agreed with the participants.

It was significantly more difficult to connect with unsuccessful candidates because the Colombian Federation of Municipalities did not count with a directory for these candidates. Additionally, they were more reluctant to be interviewed. Nevertheless, these interviews account for 30, 000 words once transcribed, and heavily informed the analysis, the interview questions asked to other participants and the insights obtained through the analysis. The same can be said about the interviews conducted with key informants, corresponding to 36, 000 words.

Secondary Material: Interviews with relevant actors and key informants (Local and International NGOs and Academics)

The initial research design sought to interview a significant sample of Key Informants (KI), which is why 11 organizations composed by political parties with a specific gender policy, research centers, diplomatic agents, and international and local NGOs working with local democracy or with women and minorities in politics were contacted. Unfortunately, only three interviews were carried out with key informants due to a lack of response or availability from the potential participants.

The questionnaire with Key Informants focused on gathering information from their firsthand perspective on working with promoting the political participation of women (Annex 2). It began by exploring the work of each organization in promoting gender equality in local democracy and the resources they offer to support women in politics. The questions also examined the specific obstacles women face when running for mayor, the role ethnicity plays in their chances of success, and how these challenges differ from those encountered in other political positions, like councilors or parliamentarians.

The subsequent questions delved into the elements necessary for women to succeed in electoral campaigns and the systemic barriers they face. The final part of the questionnaire focused on positive and negative developments for women mayors in local politics over the past decade, allowing the interviewees to reflect on broader trends. The interviews concluded with an open-ended question, inviting participants to share any additional insights or perspectives not covered earlier.

Despite being few, the interviews carried out served as a crucial source of information to understand the context in which Colombian local politics take place – both formally and informally. This is why insights from these three interviews are included as secondary material throughout the analysis. The content of this interviews saved as a starting and a guiding point for the contextualization and interpretation of the main participants responses (P1 and P2)

Contacting the Participants and Arranging the Interviews

In total, eleven key informants, nineteen mayors, and five unsuccessful candidates were invited to participate in the study. Mayors and candidates' contacts were obtained through the Colombian Federation of Municipalities (FCM) and snowball sampling, while key informants were contacted through the Swedish International Center for Local Democracy (ICLD), personal acquaintances in Uppsala and Lund University.

The initial list of mayors was facilitated by the FCM. In a relevant WhatsApp group composed almost exclusively by female mayors, a message was sent inviting to participate in the study. Fourteen members manifested interest, and their WhatsApp contact cards were then shared with me, meaning this was the first stage of consent for participation.

Other participants were recruited through snowball sampling, a widely used non-probability technique in qualitative research. This approach involves leveraging initial contacts to identify additional participants who meet the study criteria. This technique was employed in two different ways. The first one was through asking the mayors from the initial list who were interviewed to connect me with other relevant subjects. The second one was through sharing information of the research project with locals. For instance, during a self-funded trip, I serendipitously mentioned my research project to two women I met by chance. Surprisingly, both had connections with individuals who fit my participant profile and helped me secure several key interviews. They provided the contact information for five potential participants, four of whom ultimately contributed valuable material to this study.

Following this, I sent a first message through this platform to introduce the research project and establish transparency and trust. I introduced myself, mentioned the mutual contact from the Colombian Federation of Municipalities, and provided a brief overview of my study's purpose. I emphasized that the research aimed to identify the obstacles faced by women seeking to enter local politics and document their strategies for overcoming these barriers, with the ultimate goal of supporting more women in achieving leadership positions in the future. According to Foddy[64], knowing the research question in advance is a way to orient the participants' answers towards providing more information directly related to it.

The text message also clarified my affiliation with Uppsala University in Sweden to provide context and legitimacy to the study. Additionally, I highlighted the ethical considerations, reassuring the participant of the anonymity of their identity and responses, and offering to share detailed documentation about the research and data handling procedures before scheduling an interview. This initial communication was crafted to encourage voluntary participation and ensure that the potential participants were fully informed before agreeing to take part in the study. After this process 20 mayors or unsuccessful candidates replied they were interested.

Once they confirmed their interest to participate, I shared with them the Letter of Information (Annex 3) and an Ethics Form (Annex 4) crafted according to the guidelines found in Hammett.[65] detailing the purpose of the study and the possibility of their participants to remove their consent at any time. After this, it was possible to arrange and conduct seven interviews with successful candidates, two interviews with unsuccessful candidates and three interviews with key informants. Of these, one interview was carried out through phone call, one through a videocall, and the rest were conducted in person across four different departments in Colombia.

Data Handling and Organization

After the interviews were conducted, each one was anonymized by removing names, places or other data that could compromise their anonymity, and then transcribed with the help of Whisper from OpenAI. Whisper was selected due to its ability to run locally, offering greater

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[64] Foddy, W. H. (1993). Constructing questions for interviews and questionnaires: theory and practice in social research. Cambridge University Press. p.22

[65] Hammett, D., Twyman, C., & Graham, M. (2014). "Research and Fieldwork in Development" (1st ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203649107 p. 94

confidentiality by ensuring that sensitive data does not need to be uploaded to external servers. This enhances the security of the information gathered. The interviews were then listened to a second time to correct transcription errors and identify initial themes, which were noted as comments following Saldaña's jotting method.[66] Next, the transcripts were read with a focus on analyzing the obstacles and tools female mayors in Colombia face during their campaigns and mandates, and relevant sections were highlighted. These highlighted extracts were then copied into a table for further analysis. Once the process was completed for the seven interviews, the result was 560 quotes that were then translated by myself into English.

Category Analysis Strategy for Qualitative Data

The qualitative data analysis method employed in this research primarily focused on categorization as a key analytical strategy. This strategy is a systematic approach to organizing and grouping information or items based on shared characteristics or attributes. It involves identifying meaningful categories and establishing criteria for classification to create a structured framework. This method helps in managing, analyzing, and retrieving information more efficiently, making it easier to understand complex datasets or large collections of items.[67] In the first round of analysis, the data was assigned two different categories. The first one was based on the structure of the interview questions, resulting in three broad categories: Obstacle, Tool or Solution, Contextual Information or Substantive Claim[68]. The second one consisted of the themes the quote in question referred to.

On both levels, a quote could be assigned more than one label as often the passages referred both to the obstacle and to the tool or solution. For example, the quote:

> *"Also, my dad's support was very strong, my dad was very sick in the last weeks, the last months, but even so, he was helping me, he was there… my sisters' support was impressive, I mean, in the end, it was really a lot. At the end my husband kind of got involved, he was already helping us, at least he was giving us all the cups for the coffee, so, and my friends,*

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[66] Saldaña, J. (2020). "Qualitative Data Analysis Strategies" in Leavy, Patricia (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 2nd edn, Oxford Handbooks https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190 847388.001.0001 p.881

[67] Ibid. p. 881

[68] All the quotes who were exclusively assigned the Substantive Claim label have been excluded from the analysis and are instead briefly mentioned at the end of the next section to be used as pointers in substantive studies about representation and their impact in gender policies.

the people who got involved, many people came out of interest, other people were there genuinely, and saying, 'come on, we need things to change.'"

On a first level the quote was assigned the category 'tool or solution, and the themes 'network support', resource-based sponsoring' and 'partner'. After the initial theme categorization, a total of 102 codes were found. Each quote was given several codes. Upon a second revision, codes that were very similar such as "Action for Women" and "Gender Policies" were merged into one. After this process there was a total of 96 themes (Annex 5).

However, as the analysis progressed, it became evident that the initial divide of obstacles, tools and context were not sufficiently nuanced to capture the complexity of the data. Consequently, using the themes as a starting point, a more refined categorization process was implemented. The material was restructured by grouping the themes into four broader, more abstract categories based on the nature of the factors identified. These new categories included **systemic, social, identity, and behavioral factors**. This approach to categorization allowed for a more sophisticated understanding of the data, allowing to identify and explore the interconnections between different types of influences on the experiences of the participants. This categorization method allows for a flexible and iterative approach to qualitative data analysis, where initial categories are revisited and refined as patterns and themes emerge from deeper engagement with the data.

Limitations

As with many qualitative studies, this research faces certain methodological limitations. The study is geographically concentrated within four administrative regions (departments), and participant recruitment was primarily conducted through snowball sampling. While this approach facilitated access to key individuals, it may introduce biases. To ensure the anonymity of the participants, the names of the specific departments will not be disclosed.

The interview questions in this study focus on descriptive representation rather than on substantive policy outcomes related to gender equality. Meaning that participants were not systematically questioned on their policies and ideas linked to gender, meaning that the study is limited to a descriptive aspect of women political participation in local democracy.

Despite efforts to include participants belonging to ethnic and sexual minorities, it was not possible to recruit individuals from these groups for the study. As a result, their perspectives

are absent, which presents a notable limitation. The experiences of women from minority backgrounds are likely to differ from those of the majority population, as they may face unique intersectional challenges related to both their gender and their ethnic or sexual identity. The absence of these voices limits the study's ability to capture the full diversity of experiences in local politics, particularly regarding how multiple forms of marginalization may compound the barriers to representation and participation.

Notably, this study excludes male participants. As gender dynamics do not operate in isolation; they involve interactions between men and women. Excluding men limits the study's ability to fully explore how these dynamics play out in practice. Although many of the challenges identified by female candidates may be more pronounced for women, these issues warrant further examination from a broader perspective.

Another methodological limitation worth acknowledging is that the study did not systematically inquire about the role of other women in supporting the campaigns of successful candidates or joining their teams during their tenure. This is an area that merits further exploration, as several participants noted that their political careers began through involvement in supporting other candidates, often through familial connections.

Finally, given the nature of this perception-based study, the findings do not purport to capture the entirety of reality but rather aim to illuminate the lived experiences and perspectives of the women who participated in this research. Nonetheless, their insights are essential for informing future policy decisions concerning gender representation in politics.

5. Analysis and Discussion

This analysis divided the factors influencing women's political participation in municipalities into four broad categories: identity, systemic, social, and behavioral factors. These categories are not intended to represent distinct or rigid divisions but rather provide different perspectives for analyzing the material. Many of the quotes and fragments from the participants' experiences can be examined from multiple angles, but these categories were chosen to highlight specific aspects of the phenomena and identify patterns in the participants' lives, struggles, and experiences. It is important to note that these factors interact, coexist, and influence one another in a dynamic and iterative process, which can either perpetuate or deconstruct each aspect over time. This interconnectedness must be kept in mind when interpreting the findings.

Identity Factors – The Place Allocated to the Participant Within Society: Experiences, Inherent Characteristics and Acquired Characteristics

This section serves as a starting point, offering a descriptive overview of the participants' identities, without making any value judgments. Its purpose is to provide context, detailing characteristics that influenced their political experiences, either explicitly or implicitly, during the interviews. While these characteristics exist within broader social and systemic contexts, they represent the specific ways in which the participants experience and interact with the world. Therefore, this section is presented as distinct from Systemic and Structural Factors, as it is essential to understanding how identity shapes and informs the other two factors. Hence, this part of the analysis focuses on the participants' identities, backgrounds, and personal journeys, illustrating how these elements influenced their path to political office.

Inherent Characteristics

Gender Self-Perception

> *"I would always tell them, I would speak to them and say, 'You have a mother, possibly you have daughters, and they have been able to overcome many situations at home, people who have moved forward.' So, managing a municipality, although on a different scale, can be done, and women are proving from home that they are capable. I would always remind them, 'Don't speak poorly of a woman because at home you have a mother or a daughter; there is a woman looking out for you.' Here, most women, the vast majority, are homemakers. That's the job – it's not given the importance it deserves, but it should be*

visible. They are the ones who care for their children, who educate them. Women are always there, for everything." – Participant P1.3

Participants perceived differently how much their condition of women had affected their political experiences. Only participant P2.2 explicitly perceived that gender had not affected her journey at a large extent. The rest of the candidates were more critical against gender-based attitudes. These attitudes ranged from gender based microaggressions, out-of-proportion criticism, pressure on private life reputation and political performance, political counter-alliances motivated by the gender of the participant, negative attitudes from other women, decreased trust, or impostor syndrome. All these elements will be further developed in later sections.

Several participants expressed women had certain characteristics when governing more sensitive, more conciliating, more caring, and better at administrating. This phenomenon has also been noted by Anne Philips on the association between women and a "politics of care" where women would perform better or only be concerned by certain issues. Phillips is critical of arguments that present women as inherently superior or more moral than men in politics. She warns against basing the case for more women in politics on their supposed superiority over men, especially when this is tied to women's role as mothers, as this can also limit the credibility of their agency in other arenas. However, this rhetoric seemed to be particularly useful for convincing voters of women's capacity and is perhaps a necessary concession in a context heavily governed by traditional gender norms.

Age

Another inherent characteristic that affected candidates' experience was their age. Participant P1.2 was mocked and questioned for being too old, despite still being below the country's retirement age, and many male candidates still in office being the same age. "*So, everyone minimized me. They saw me as so insignificant that they said, 'No, that's an old lady who can't even walk in heels anymore. She is from our movement, but that old lady is not going to be anyone.'*"

On the other hand, participants were perceived as unfit for office for being too young, even when they had a university degree and relevant experience in politics, as was the case for P2.1 and P2.3. "*People would say to me: 'No, she won't have all the full responsibility because she is a young girl, because she likes to have fun, because she is with her friends, and she plays*

volleyball.''' P1.4 noted that this characteristic, combined with her civic status, made her more vulnerable to sexual harassment "*when you are a woman in politics, younger, single, without children, you are like a piece of meat wandering around for the men in high power.*"

Private Sphere Social Characteristics

These characteristics refer to circumstances into which participants are born or acquire through non-institutional means, such as marriage, extended family, or social class. They represent elements that can either privilege or hinder the trajectories of female candidates, and, for the most part, these factors lie outside of their control.

Political Role Models or Relationships

> "*So, during The Violence*[69]*, my grandfather was mayor three times. (...) I wanted to be like my grandfather. He was a very honest, very transparent person.*" – Participant P1.2

One of the key private sphere elements identified is the presence of a political role model within the family. The quote above illustrates the role that her grandfather had played in her political motivations. But beyond that, this early exposure suggests women in this situation are more likely to be better equipped to navigate obstacles and strategize effectively, as was the case for participant P1.4 "*I mean, I carry politics in my blood. (...) So, my grandfather was mayor in several towns [of the department]. When it was, it was not by popular votes. (...) It was by appointment. My grandfather was a very social man. He didn't make money, but he made friends. So, I was the little girl who occasionally came along with him. So, he was in his meetings with people, and I was playing around nearby, but I was listening.*"

The same participant also recurred to her grandfather's friend for mentor type advice during her campaign after a tough political treason she experienced and that affected her deeply. Another of her family members had been mayor of the municipality a few years before her and offered strategic support throughout her campaign. This shows different ways in which personal political networks can be useful for women in this situation. This mayor also spoke in very strategic terms and knew which actors she needed to convince from the beginning,

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[69] "La Violencia" (The Violence) is a term used to describe a particularly turbulent period in Colombian history, spanning roughly from 1948 to 1958. This period was characterized by intense political conflict and widespread violence throughout the country.

showing how beneficial factors like a political network can be for individuals, and which individuals have little control over.[70]

This factor is also observed, to a lesser degree, to those participants whose families or spouses had been involved in other candidates' campaigns. Although none of the participants' husbands had been mayors, P1.3's husband had served as a member of the Municipal Council, which gave her some familiarity with the workings of local government. Similarly, family members of participants P1.1 and P2.2 had been involved in political campaigns.

> *"My parents do like politics quite a bit. And they had always been involved in the process supporting other mayors, but never in the family. I mean, we are not from a political family or of political significance or anything." – Participant P1.1*

This type of involvement consisted mainly of helping with logistical aspects, preparing food, organizing events, that was the case for participant P2.2 shortly after moving in with her grandfather. *"So, there they held campaigns and stuff, and I, helped a lot alongside my grandmother. I brought the food, that they were going to have an event"* but it progressively led to commitments with more responsibility. These types of experiences helped them acquire a professional network that is needed in order to lead a campaign.

None of the participants - except for Participant P1.2 - belonged to long-ruling families or political elites, and nothing in their responses indicates that they had an overwhelming economic support, as this candidate also recurred to minor scale sponsor-based resources to finance her campaign. While the influence and reputation of the family might have been an asset, it is, however, impossible to determine in what way or to which extent from the material collected.

Private Life Elements

> *"In the first campaign, then, some criticized that at that time I was living with my daughter's father, and he was the notary of [a municipality of the region]. So, they said that I would not have the ability to lead, but that he was the one who would command and do because he was the one with experience, he was the older one. And the other thing was that at that time, well, I was very young." – Participant P2.2*

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[70] Here I do not intend to make any value judgement or lessen merit to the achievements of mayors in these situations, but it needs to be noted and included as part of the analysis.

Private lives of the participants also seem to have played an important role in the voters' perceptions of them. Three participants were married and/or had a male partner they lived with, three were single mothers or didn't cohabitate with their partner, all these participants had children, although some of them were independent. Only one participant was single and had no children. Regardless of their situation, all of them were criticized on ground of their personal life by voters or political opponents through social media, traditional media, discourses or propaganda.

According to themselves, motherhood also played a central role in shaping the participants' political journeys. Despite facing skepticism from voters – particularly single mothers, who were questioned about their ability to prioritize the municipality – candidates themselves viewed their roles as mothers as a source of strength and inspiration. They drew on personal experiences with illness, infidelity, and violence to emerge stronger, as participant P2.3 reflects: *"That is the struggle of a woman, right? They say, 'You have two children who are over there, far away, your husband is being unfaithful, but it's because you went to pursue politics and left your husband.'"*

Participants P2.1 and P2.3 recall criticism in reference to their private life and their role as mothers. Their reaction seems to be 'developing a thicker armor' and 'stop caring' about these comments. Participant P2.3 even decided to start bringing her children to the office despite her surroundings disapproval because that allows her to spend more time with them and worry less about their safety. Participant P2.1 decided to 'prove them wrong' through her actions and performance in office.

Hardships

Another important private life factor was the experience of domestic violence. Two participants had encountered this, and while it may seem indirectly related to their political careers, it shaped their perspectives on gender dynamics and leadership. These experiences arguably gave them a deeper understanding of power structures and resilience.

For participant P1.2, who was going through domestic violence, community activities represented a gateway into leaving the abusive situation she was in. *"So, life on the farm for me was very pleasant with the community, but at home it was a total hell. Then we were going to do an activity to create a sports complex for three neighborhoods [names]. And my daughter's father showed off that day and got very drunk. He hit me very badly that day, in*

front of the community, it was horrible. And that's where I felt it was enough. I made the decision that we should separate." Members of the community activities employed her, and she was able to reach a certain degree of economic independence. A few years later it was those same employers who financially supported her political career.

Economic Independence and Social Class

Economic independence and social class were also significant private sphere factors that influenced the participants' experiences. These aspects played a crucial role due to the financial demands of running a campaign in Colombia. As we will explore in later sections, obtaining political support – such as party endorsements – is very challenging. Even when participants secured endorsements, the financial backing from political parties was minimal. Given the resource-intensive nature of campaign dynamics, all participants had to supplement their efforts with personal resources, whether through fundraising from family and friends, using personal savings, or securing sponsorships. This reliance on personal and external funding created a fertile environment for the rise of clientelism, as candidates became increasingly dependent on resource-based support.

Many participants took out loans, invested their savings, or sought out additional resources to fund their campaigns, underscoring the financial burden and economic barriers involved. So, an existing purchasing power is definitely going to improve the likelihood of women pursuing a political campaign. Due to the pay gap explained above, this makes it less likely for women to be able to finance a campaign while remaining independent in their ideals.

Public Sphere Social Characteristics

Public Sphere Social Characteristics are those that the participants acquired through professional experiences and who were related to a lesser degree to the situations they were born into, or they had little control over.

Public Sector Jobs and Involvement in Community Activities

"I have always found serving others appealing. I don't conceive of politics as normal politics; rather, it's like a space to serve. When I was in university, I wanted to work with the State. (…) I started working as a police inspector in a little town nearby. We built some houses, that is, we did a lot of social work. And there, well, I started to work on all the social issues" – Participant P2.3

When asked what led them to get involved into local politics, all participants evoked to some extent their involvement in local community-based projects or activities. Participation in these projects allowed them to build networks, gain confidence, and develop essential political skills. It also gave them visibility and credibility within their communities, which eventually led to opportunities to campaign and run for office. Participant P1.2 recalled a program provided by the National Learning Service.[71] *"The truth is they even paid us, they gave us a salary, I don't know, I don't remember how much it was back then. And we learned... we learned to make arequipe, manjar blanco, bocadillo, jams, antipasto.[72] "*

As mentioned above, this first involvement helped her improve her personal and financial situation progressively. She was then employed as the secretary and when one of them was thinking of running for a Council seat, *"Well, then one of them got excited and said he wanted to be a councilor of [the municipality]. And the other colleague said to him: 'No, let it be [her].' I mean, he was saying that I should be a candidate for the council. That everyone greeted me, while no one knew him. (…) So far, I have been the councilor with the highest number of votes in popular elections. So, we got two councilors from that same list."*

This passage suggests community activities were also critical in helping participants establish themselves as leaders. These engagements provided them with a platform to interact with potential voters, acquire experience in problem-solving, and develop leadership skills. Like in the case for participant P2.1. *"Well, my first experience was at seventeen, the whole school was there. And we were summoned to organize the fairs and parties. There I was appointed president of the Board, we started to do community work. (…) I started to lead; I was a student representative. Then we liked to come to the Municipal Council to present projects related to education, to demand that the mayor improves the facilities."* The social capital they gained through these activities was crucial to their political success, as she was eventually offered an administrative position at the mayor's office.

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[71] SENA is the National Learning Service (Servicio Nacional de Aprendizaje) and it's a state entity that "is responsible for fulfilling the function that corresponds to the State, of investing in the social and technical development of the Colombian workers by offering and implementing a comprehensive professional training for the incorporation and development of people in productive activities that contribute to the country's social, economic and technological development." SENA. "History, Mission and Vision" Recovered from https://www.sena.edu.co/en-us/Pages/sena.aspx on October 3, 2024.

[72] Colombian spreads and preserves

Public sector jobs seem to have similar effect in building networks, through these experiences women were invited to support someone else's campaign like was the case for mayor P2.3 through her experience at the police and later through her employment at the municipality. A candidate running for mayor approached her to ask for help in his campaign: *"I didn't know him, but he said to me, 'come on, I know that everyone talks about you, that you did a very good job in the public prosecutor's office, and I want you to support me'"* and this passage of participant P2.1 *"I started helping all the departments, thus earning respect, gaining everyone's trust, and in five months I was already the secretary of the municipal office. I lasted seven months in the office and then became the secretary of the mayor's office."*

Whether through community projects, local government roles, or public service positions, these engagements served as steppingstones, enabling the participants to transition into formal political roles. The social capital and practical experience gained through these activities were instrumental in their eventual political success, demonstrating the potential and need to strengthen pathways of grassroots involvement and public service.

Education and Qualifications

"What about all the money that comes into a political party for functioning? I wrote to the party on the topic of the network looking for who could help us with training. And who helped us instead? Some Mexicans with this movement (...) [A figure in the Mexican association] came to [a Colombian NGO] with a political coach that she has, who has helped her in the process. She didn't charge, [the association] just paid for the hotel and the tickets. It was a very nice labor. But the parties don't help with that. They should help us with ... I don't know... Neurolinguistic programming in politics, or anything that allows you to endure these politics. I saw today my friend, the former mayor of [another municipality in the department] ... She is broken." – Participant P1.4

The level of education wasn't included as a demographic question, but it was identified by some participants as an important tool in their journey to office. Two participants were lawyers, and P1.3 had a background in business administration with years of professional experience. P1.2, although lacking formal education, gained considerable expertise through community activities and infrastructure projects – areas closely linked to local politics, especially in the Colombian context. Furthermore, the critics received by participant P2.2 pointed mostly to her lack of university training, suggest that voters value this factor. She mentions she could

overcome this factor thanks to the skills in her working team and her empirical experience in politics.

For participant P1.4, *"As a woman, yes. Well, for me academic training was fundamental. Without education, not the fact of being a lawyer, but what education gives you, which is to shape thought, to shape criteria, all that which gives you the profession. Without that, I think I wouldn't have been able to achieve it."* Participant P1.2, as mentioned above, started her journey through one of SENA's courses, which was not necessarily gender oriented. P2.1 mentioned a policy in their municipality to employ women as cleaning staff to provide a source of income, after which they are encouraged to pursue further training or education, with growth opportunities later offered within the municipal office. I had the opportunity to have an informal conversation with one of these women, who was the mayor's secretary, and that's how I learned about this initiative. Through such efforts, they achieved almost a 50% gender balance in the municipal workforce.

However, even for participants with university-level education what is typically considered as 'relevant sectors,' such as P1.4 (quoted at the beginning of this section) and P2.2, there was a strong demand for more training opportunities in the political field. *"I took a public speaking course with an actor, but it was out of my own pocket. It was three days that really helped me a lot. But those things the party should help with, right?"* Similarly, for participant P1.3, *"I am a business administrator, but I didn't feel that governing would be so difficult because I knew the dynamics of managing budgets, managing personnel, all that stuff. But… no, (…) The most difficult thing is convincing people to trust in what you are proposing."*

Formal and informal training appears to be valuable tools for women entering local politics. While university-level education was highlighted as important, it was not the only type of training that proved useful. Even non-gender-based courses can foster women's involvement in public spheres and help them acquire both technical and interpersonal skills. Participants emphasized the need for specific training in political arenas and access to resources that would enable them to improve their skills and have more opportunities. All of this suggests that education plays an important role in women's involvement in politics, and it would be relevant to study more in detail how these dynamics operate.

Lessons from Identity Factors

In conclusion, the interaction of systemic, social, and psychological factors with identity characteristics is complex and multifaceted, shaping the experiences of the participants in both explicit and implicit ways. The inherent and acquired characteristics, such as gender, age, family background, and public sector experiences, played pivotal roles in influencing their political journeys. While these characteristics are deeply rooted in broader social and systemic contexts, they were key determinants of how the participants navigated political obstacles, built their networks, and ultimately succeeded in their campaigns. Meanwhile, education, community involvement, and social networks from previous campaign experiences created a foundation for their public sphere engagement. The importance of private life, economic independence, and public sector involvement emerged as crucial aspects that helped form their political identities and careers. Recognizing these interactions not only helps in understanding the participants' experiences but also underscores the need for continued exploration into how identity factors shape political engagement, particularly for women in traditionally male-dominated spaces.

Systemic and Structural Factors – How Institutions Affect the Participant

Political Parties - Party Endorsement and Inner Dynamics

> *"Afterwards, I even had an interview with those from [party A] and with those from [party B]. I also had to submit my resume, go to an interview so that they would give us the approval. So, it's not easy for us women when they say that because of political quotas, they have to say that 30% or 50% has to be for women, no, no, it's not easy. They always measure one's track record, they always conduct an interview, 'Is it worth it? Is she worth it?'" – Participant P2.1*

One of the major challenges participants faced during their political journey was securing an endorsement from their party – or any party. In Colombian politics, endorsements are critical, serving as a form of validation that allows candidates to officially run under the party's name. However, many participants noted that political parties tend to avoid supporting female candidates due to a perceived lack of voter support for women. Participant P1.4 suggested that parties often hesitate because they believe voters are more likely to favor male candidates. This leads parties to prioritize political influence on a national scale, opting to back the candidate they believe has the best chance of winning.

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As Participant P1.1 explained, *"I was a militant in the party from the age of 18, when I went to ask for their endorsement; after nine long years, they did not give me the endorsement. Why? I didn't have a senator backing me."* This reveals how party politics favor those with influential connections over candidates who lack such support.

Even when women receive endorsements, they often encounter other challenges. Many participants described the need to compromise their political agendas in order to secure these endorsements. In particular, they had to tone down their gender-related policies or align with party values that didn't fully reflect their own. This compromise illustrates the tension between the "politics of presence" and the "politics of ideas" that theorist Anne Phillips describes – where female candidates must balance representing women's issues with conforming to broader party agendas.

Several participants also had to embrace stereotypically 'womanly' roles, such as advocating for family values, in order to appeal to both the electorate and their party. This reflects another of Phillips' ideas: the expectation that women are 'better' than men in specific areas, such as family and caregiving. Interestingly, this may explain why there appears to be a higher representation of female mayors in right-wing parties compared to left-wing ones – an observation that warrants further research.

The Colombian Observatory for Women carried out a study on violence against women in politics in the 2023 elections[73]. The study had 144 participants who had been candidates.[74] The findings were that 22.4% of the candidates reported receiving no support from their political organizations during the campaign, making it the most common response. An equal proportion, 22%, indicated that they did receive training in financial transparency (Capacitación Cuentas Claras), while 19.6% received support specifically for advertising expenses. Some candidates (10.8%) mentioned receiving assistance for organizing campaign events or meetings. Support in strategic communication, campaign management, and electoral marketing was received by 9.2% of respondents, the same proportion that reported receiving legal advisory support for

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[73] Observatorio Colombiano de las Mujeres (2023) "Encuesta sobre la violencia contra las mujeres que participan en política. Balance participación políticca de mujeres en el proceso electoral 2023 " Colombia Potencia de la Vida. Recovered from
https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrIjoiYmI2NTQyMmYtYjZlNy00NDVjLWI2ZTItOTU5ZjI4YzkwNzYyIiwidCI6IjU3N2ZjMWQ4LTA5MjItNDU4ZS04N2JmLWVjNGY0NTVlYjYwMCIsImMiOjR9 on October 6, 2024
[74] The study also included 106 women involved in campaigns, but this data is excluded from this analysis.

addressing electoral irregularities. A smaller percentage (4.8%) indicated receiving financial support such as advances, loans, or donations, and 2% selected "Other" as the type of support received. Overall, the study highlights that a significant number of women candidates faced a lack of organizational support, which may have impacted their campaign efforts. 31% of the woman associated the lack of electoral guarantees to their political party. This numbers put into context the lack of support that women have from their parties in electoral processes even when they have secured an endorsement.

Participant P2.2 touched on the party's limited support, stating, *"No. Here the political parties, just by giving their endorsement, it's like saying, 'I'm already helping and be grateful I gave you the endorsement.' But there is really a lot of political inexperience."* This shows how, once the endorsement is given, party involvement often stops there, leaving candidates to shoulder additional burdens like campaign expenses, as they must print materials featuring the party's logo and credentials.

For some participants, grassroots efforts became the solution. Rather than relying solely on party endorsement, they gained political entry by leveraging local support. Participants P1.1, P1.3, and P2.2 employed this strategy. Mayor P1.4 took a unique approach, strategically engaging with a rural community (*vereda*) that her party had historically struggled to reach, and that inviting the stakeholders that would grant her the endorsement. "*They didn't bring me the endorsement that day,"* she recalled, *"but they were left like... like impressed. Calling two hundred people out of nowhere, before elections, well, in a town like ours, that's a lot. And at the time of mass, that's a lot. Well, they left with good thoughts, but they didn't bring me the endorsement."*

This illustrates how candidates often had to find innovative ways to demonstrate their value to parties, while navigating a political system that continues to marginalize women. Although some achieved endorsements through creative grassroots methods, others had to compromise their values or conform to stereotypical roles to gain a foothold in the political sphere.

Lawfare or Legal Warfare against Women

"Well, here the statute of the opposition applies, meaning that when someone in the opposition submits an information request, one has five days to respond to them, not the fifteen that the constitution dictates, but five days. So, the one who lost to me ended up in second place, and he could accept or not a seat in the council. He accepted the seat. And

during January and February, I practically worked for him. Because he had me up to here [points at her neck] with requests asking for everything. So, the lawyer said, 'no, that is persecution. I mean, one thing is that he requests information, and another thing is to send thirty requests for information a month,' and we are exclusively working for him. It was too much. (...) They were silly questions. 'How many contracts have you made? Why? Send me copies.' And we hadn't even started. I mean, it was an administrative burden." – Participant P1.4

As previously noted, lawfare has been utilized as a political tool in Colombia. P1.1 faced fabricated disqualification claims after winning her election, and keeping her from office for several months, while P1.2 endured lawsuits she identified coming from a political elite group. P1.3 was subjected to constant denouncements, false media reports, and online attacks throughout her term. As described at the beginning of this section, P1.4 dealt with relentless administrative harassment from an opposition council member who had also been a previous mayor, and who overwhelmed her with frivolous information requests, openly admitting his intent to disrupt her work. Similarly, P2.3 recalled legal challenges aimed at discrediting her after registering to vote. These tactics significantly hindered their political efforts and strained their resources. Only P2.1 and P2.2 didn't mention any processes that could fall into this category, but I also didn't openly ask this question at the time of the interviews as I had not identified the tendency. Additionally, I had hoped to interview one mayor who had been disqualified during this period, and even went to her municipality, but in the end, she wasn't able to give the interview.

Admittedly, I cannot be entirely certain whether all the participants' experiences discussed above fall definitively under the category of lawfare, as verifying the legal documentation was beyond the scope of this investigation and the relevant materials were not readily accessible. However, the fact that five out of the seven mayors and both unsuccessful candidates interviewed, reported similar experiences strongly suggests that this could be the case, especially considering that such practices often target minority or 'alternative' candidates. In the political arena, women undoubtedly remain a minority.

Furthermore, there are other factors in the interviews that support this hypothesis. The first one being the involvement of media in lawfare tactics. According to Trujillo Osorio lawfare tactics

are often accompanied by defamatory or biased media campaigns.[75] This seems to have been the case for participant P1.3 *"the opposition [was] denouncing me for everything, absolutely everything. They used social media, sent false news to some regional media, constant attacks, that was indeed a constant for all four years."* The second element is the source of this attacks are often other ruling parties or political elites, as for Mayor P1.2 *"They filed lawsuits against me [when] I was campaigning. A lawsuit against me from the family of the other political group in [the municipality]."*

It is important to note that both unsuccessful candidates interviewed also mentioned episodes like this. The first candidate encountered difficulties opening a campaign bank account, which delayed the start of their campaign by about a month. This delay put them at risk of violating campaign finance laws, as they couldn't officially start campaigning without the account. The second one, who was rejected by three different banks before being able to create a campaign account, said the following about lawfare:

> *This is the issue where they no longer threaten your life, but instead start putting legal obstacles in your way, right? And this happens, for example, when they use the National Electoral Council - their new tactic. They use the National Electoral Council to open investigations against those candidates who are uncomfortable for local politicians. And why do I say this? Because the National Electoral Council is made up of magistrates who are appointed by traditional political parties, (…) But if you look closely, who do they open investigations against?*

While this phenomenon does not apply exclusively to women, a more in-depth statistical study with a gender perspective is necessary to understand how lawfare practices specifically affect women's political participation. Unfortunately, I was unable to locate any existing studies on this issue in the databases at my disposal.

This phenomenon is also closely linked to Segato's theories on the violent state. The author's analysis of the tension between 'contract' and 'status' in modern societies is particularly

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[75] Trujillo Osorio, O.J. (2024) "*Lawfare* o "guerra jurídica", el progresismo sobre los estrados judiciales" Periódico UNAL. Recovered from https://periodico.unal.edu.co/articulos/lawfare-o-guerra-juridica-el-progresismo-sobre-los-estrados-judiciales on October 5, 2024.

relevant to understanding lawfare.[76] She contends that while modern societies are ostensibly based on the principle of equality and individual rights (contract), they are built upon a foundation of hierarchical structures and traditional power dynamics (status). Lawfare exploits this tension, utilizing the language of equality and due process to undermine the very principles it claims to uphold, ultimately reinforcing existing inequalities and eroding democratic processes.[77]

In other words, Lawfare can be understood as a manifestation of this symbolic and structural violence. By manipulating legal mechanisms to target and silence opponents, especially those already marginalized, lawfare reinforces existing power structures and perpetuates the subordination of specific groups, including women.

Civil Society Associations and Legal Mechanisms

"– But here you cannot complain, you cannot report, you cannot say anything.

– Why? Is it counterproductive for you?

– … Persecution." – Participant P1.4

This exchange reflects the perception that filing official electoral complaints could lead to negative consequences, particularly in the form of political persecution. As a result, some candidates avoided using formal mechanisms for fear of retaliation, thereby further limiting their ability to challenge unfair practices during campaigns. These findings also align to those made by the MOE regarding underreports of political violence.

Additionally, many candidates were unaware of the legal tools available to them during their campaigns and only became familiar with these resources once they assumed office. As P1.3 observed, *"[It's a process of] trial and error but obviously, there are many things about governance and the issue of equity that one only comes to know when in office."* This highlights the gap in knowledge and preparation that many women face when entering the political arena. The lack of training in these areas made their journey more challenging, underscoring the need for better resources and guidance before they step into office.

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[76] Segato, R. (2003). "La argamasa jerárquica: violencia moral, reproducción del mundo y la eficacia simbólica del derecho" in *Las estructuras elementales de la violencia. Ensayos sobre género entre la antropología, el psicoanálisis y los derechos humanos*. Prometeo Libros. http://repositorio.ciem.ucr.ac.cr/jspui/handle/123456789/156. p.21

[77] Ibid. p.18

The Network of Female Mayors for Democracy and Peace, coordinated by the Colombian Federation of Municipalities, emerged as the most cited support mechanism. Almost all participants in the study were contacted through this network, which suggests a potential bias in how familiar the mayors were with it. However, the network's value should not be underestimated, as it brings together a significant portion of Colombia's female mayors, serving as a crucial platform for sharing information and resources.

Establishing a similar network or initiative at the candidate level could be immensely beneficial, particularly for providing women with the tools they need to effectively run for office. As P1.3 further noted, *"Yes, of course, there is a line from the National Electoral Council, from Congress that receives those kinds of complaints, and obviously it would have helped. It would have helped as well because one goes into the campaign, sometimes without the tools to do it, right? We do it empirically, as one would say."* Such networks could play a vital role in bridging the knowledge gaps that exist, especially for first-time candidates.

In contrast to the limited support offered by political parties or state institutions, civil society organizations often played a larger role in the participants' campaign experiences. However, the general distrust in traditional political institutions means that many civil associations distance themselves from politics, missing opportunities to support new voices.

A noteworthy model of support is provided by the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD), whom I had the opportunity to interview in their offices in Bogotá, and which offers a wide range of initiatives to empower women running for electoral office. These include democracy training schools, political empowerment programs, and practical clinics that focus on campaign strategies, message building, and political marketing. Additionally, the NIMD addresses key barriers to women's political participation, such as violence against women in politics, and offers platforms for women across party lines to collaborate and share experiences. This holistic approach not only strengthens women's capacities but also provides them with the practical tools necessary to succeed in the political sphere.

The integration of these kinds of civil society efforts, in conjunction with networks like the one provided by the Colombian Federation of Municipalities, could significantly enhance the capacity of women to overcome obstacles in their political careers and participate more fully in governance.

Corruption, Political Elites and Poor Governance

Corruption and poor governance significantly impact both the ability of female mayors to access office and their capacity to effectively campaign, access or exercise their mandate once in power.

Campaigning

Corruption in political campaigning often revolves around negotiations over municipal resources and political favors, with stakeholders viewing public offices as assets to be divided. In these contexts, candidates must carefully navigate a web of interests, often seeking strategic support from different groups. However, these efforts become especially complicated when political elites are involved.

Participant P2.3 recalls a conversation where a political figure blatantly likened the mayor's office to a cake, saying, *"Each of us has the right to a piece."* The participant expressed discomfort by saying, *"talk to me about the beautiful things about the town, about anything you want, but don't talk to me like that right away."* This exchange illustrates how campaign discussions can focus on resource distribution and personal gain rather than genuine governance or community development.

Additionally, another participant had to face demands from the former mayor during negotiations, insisting on being granted the management of a community center and ensuring his position as the candidate in the next election. The participant pushed back, responding, *"You might win from somewhere, but the center is very messed up… I can't make a commitment now and promise you'll be the next candidate; I don't know how the political dynamics will evolve."* The negotiation had to take place because members of the political elite were pushing for it. The participant would have been endangered or severely affected if she had refused this meeting.

Efforts to seek alliances or secure strategic support from various groups were often undermined by the influence of political elites, who had the power to shape campaign outcomes through resource control or insider deals. This made it difficult for candidates to maintain ethical standards or focus on genuine governance, as they were constantly navigating pressures from elites seeking personal gain, or to maintain their or to maintain their status as informal rulers.

Accessing Office

    "– Those are things that happen here in politics and that there always has to be money. (…)

    – Was the money intended so that you couldn't possession?

    – Yes, the money was so that I could not be mayor, I mean, so that they would remove me from there. You understand? So that new elections would come, and they could enter the ring again. And I would be left out, having been elected by the people." – Participant P1.1

Corrupt practices, often employed by political elites or opposing groups, are used to manipulate systems and prevent female, and other candidates from taking office. For example, Participant P1.1 suggests that her opponents formed a counter-alliance against her, using both political maneuvers and illegal methods. She implies that money played a key role in these efforts to obstruct her from assuming office, reflecting a corrupt system designed to exclude certain candidates.

    "Well, they asked us for a resource… I didn't have it either because I didn't have money for that, but well, it was obtained and the other evil ones, they thought that this wouldn't happen. So, the money they had given didn't help them for that because they thought that was already resolved. When they realized, I had already solved the things. So, on August 2, the ruling came out that I could already enter the office."[78]

Mayor P1.1 explains she solved this episode because a male mayor from the same department had a pending process that couldn't be resolved before her own case was resolved. This is how she managed to get her case judged ten months after she had been elected, and eight months after she was supposed to take office.

This excerpt references how the money was intended to prevent P1.1 from becoming mayor. This implies a direct link between political power and monetary influence, where elections and legitimate processes can be subverted through bribes or financial manipulation. This attitude also reflects a broader societal acceptance of corruption as a necessary evil to navigate the

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[78] Given the context, the narrative points to potential corrupt practices, but it's important to remain cautious in interpretation. Although the speaker doesn't explicitly mention bribery or corruption, her description of how 'money had to be involved' and how financial resources were used to influence political outcomes strongly suggests corrupt practices. In contexts where corruption has become normalized, people may rely on subtle cues and shared understandings rather than openly discussing illegal activities. The speaker's repeated references to money being a required element in political dealings suggest this type of implicit behavior, even though they do not use explicit language. Culturally, it may be risky or uncomfortable to openly acknowledge corruption, especially in systems where it is deeply embedded.

political landscape, especially in regions where governance is weak or undermined by such practices. The normalization of such requests indicates that this type of corruption has become systemic and is accepted as part of the process, fitting within the concept of normative corruption. This creates a scenario where corrupt acts are seen as the "way things work" rather than a deviation from ethical norms.

Corruption is also closely linked to political violence. Participant P2.1, for instance, recounted the following episode after I asked her if she had received any threats:

> *"Yes, many times. And more from men, they threatened me. In this campaign, another candidate did it. (…) The previous [female] mayor, who had teamed up with me, had passed away. So [he said], 'One has already left, so it's difficult for the other one to leave.' (…) One of the trucks we were in was shot at, so when they shot at us, I said: 'come on, this is not a game.' The man would get drunk (…) They also made threats saying that at all costs they would not allow me to arrive. Because I was the one who had the most knowledge, and I was going to realize all the mistakes they were making, the embezzlement that was left here in the municipality. So, they were not going to allow me to arrive. I had to inform the Prosecutor's Office, look for a [protection] group because so far it was only women who were with me."*

According to her, the main reason they did not want her to possession was that she would uncover the irregular practices that the previous administration had committed. Data from several reporting institutions and civil associations discussed above has shown that women are disproportionately affected by political violence, and corruption seems to be a factor that aggravates this situation.

Exercising Power

Note: The following section contains detailed descriptions of sexual harassment episodes that might be upsetting to some audiences.

Upon assuming office, many mayors faced significant obstacles due to the mismanagement left behind by previous administrations. Several participants described receiving an administration in chaos, with missing reports, financial disarray, and no clear handover of responsibilities.

As mayor P2.1 explained, *"We did not receive resources either for fiscal efficiency or for administrative reasons, due to all the mismanagements that the previous mayor had. Now we*

managed to receive those resources." Participant P1.3 echoed this sentiment, describing how *"we worked very hard to leave things organized, orderly, so that there wouldn't be so much difficulty. Because I had to come in and find a lot of disorder."* These accounts suggest that outgoing administrations may intentionally create barriers for their successors, hindering their ability to govern effectively from the start. This 'messy' state of affairs, while not always explicitly labeled as corruption, could imply deliberate sabotage intended to make it difficult for the incoming mayor to succeed. This mismanagement was often coupled with harsh public criticism, seemingly coordinated to undermine the new administration, and that could perhaps be linked to some aspects of lawfare discussed above.

A key question is whether there are sanctions in place for mayors who fail to provide proper reports or intentionally leave an administration in disarray. In many cases, accountability mechanisms are either weak or poorly enforced, allowing previous mayors to escape responsibility for their mismanagement. This lack of accountability further perpetuates a culture of corruption, where powerful figures believe they can engage in unethical behavior without facing repercussions.

Moreover, the corruption and administrative disorder female mayors inherit are often exacerbated by gender-based obstacles, including sexual harassment and discrimination. Corruption creates an environment in which those in power feel emboldened to commit a range of infractions, knowing that the system does little to hold them accountable.

Mayor P1.4, for instance, recalls several episodes where she was afraid to be alone with male functionaries in their offices because she was in no position to defend herself due to the power dynamics at play.

> *"– They would tell me, 'Come on, give me oral sex here. It'll feel good.'*
> *– Just like that?*
> *– Yes, like that, literally. Literally. And I was like 'no, no, no.' I mean, I had to act a certain way, I couldn't say that it was disrespectful.*
> *– Oh, God.*
> *– (...) Sometimes I was afraid to go to an office because you couldn't slap them or anything. I mean, I was super vulnerable in that sense. 'Come on, you can access various things. You can commission very well. Let's go out.' I would say, no, [name], just send me the resources to the municipality. But that was tough, it was tough. (...) I mean, because you can't say. 'Hey, you're a harasser son of a bitch.' It's up to you to get into the game without actually*

entering. You know what I mean? (…) Several projects couldn't happen because of that. (…) And that's how the four years went by for me."

The participant said that she felt compelled to change her physical appearance to make herself 'less desirable' because she felt that reporting or defending herself was not a viable option. Participant P2.3 also mention episodes of sexual harassment throughout her campaign. These episodes show how dynamics of patriarchy and the tendency to see women as sexual object is magnified in power scenarios who affect the candidate at a personal and professional level.

Quotas, Tokenism and instrumentalization of Women

Closely linked to poor governance is the practice of tokenism or instrumentalization of women throughout the election process. This practice missuses the quota law system in order to maintain a patriarchal and male dominated government. Instrumentalizing women is a form of corruption. Admittedly the participants in this study did not explicitly refer to this type of experience, however it is important to highlight the extent to which this practice, identified as gender focused corruption affect the fair participation and representation of women.

The NIMD addresses the issues of tokenism and instrumentalization in their work with women in politics. They emphasize the importance of strengthening women's leadership skills to combat these problems in political party roles. These women are often not active contenders for the electoral vote, serving merely to meet the quota requirement. This approach helps to counter the risk of women being relegated to symbolic or peripheral positions without real influence or decision-making power. The NIMD also advocates for sanctions to be put in place against parties that engage in the instrumentalization of women, to ensure that the inclusion of women in politics is meaningful and not just the sake of appearances.[79]

Social Factors – How Individuals Interact with the Participant

Criticism and Political Violence

While political violence has been mentioned in earlier sections in connection with factors influencing female political participation, this section offers a more systematic analysis of these episodes and provides a nuanced understanding of how they operate. It also delves into the

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[79] Insights gathered during the interview with the Netherlands Institute of Multiparty Democracy

agency of voters in this process. Criticism and political violence faced by female political figures often comes in several forms and on multiple levels:

1. *Policy Criticism*: Participants faced criticism of their policies and performance, often a standard aspect of political life.
2. *Disinformation*: Participants also dealt with misinformation campaigns about their policies and intended actions, both during their campaigns and their time in office. For example, participant P1.4 shared how her predecessor, officially part of the same political alliance, spread rumors about her allegedly misusing a budget meant for a traditional village event before she had even taken office.
3. *Attacks on Identity or Background*: In some cases, the attacks were personal. Participant P1.2 faced criticism for spending time abroad and was dismissed as an outsider, referred to as "the foreigner." Similarly, participant P2.3 was attacked for lacking financial resources.
4. *Attacks on Reputation or Private Life*: The fourth form of criticism involved attempts to damage the participants' reputation or personal life.
5. *Verbal Aggressions and Threats*: Participants faced direct verbal aggression and threats.
6. *Physical Aggressions*: Physical violence also occurred, often escalating beyond threats.

Participant P1.4 described how these episodes led her to the adoption of protective measures. She recalls, *"They also threatened me again. I hadn't asked for protection. But let's say that because of those situations, they assigned someone to accompany me. Over there, people are a little difficult. 'And be very careful about coming here alone. Things could happen to you.'"*

The first five types of aggression – policy criticism, disinformation, personal attacks, attacks on private life, and verbal threats – were most commonly experienced through social media.

Participant P1.4 described the relentless harassment she faced online, stating, *"On social media, they ran a horrible campaign against me. Horrible. Everything I did was bad. Everything."* Participant P1.2 also reported receiving death threats on social media. Participant P1.3 emphasized the overwhelming nature of social media harassment, noting, *"On social media, the continuous attack – many fake profiles have been created. People make derogatory comments, but you don't have the tools to report it properly if you don't know who's behind the profiles."* The attacks even extended to participants' families.

Threats and Physical Violence

In addition to verbal harassment, participants also encountered physical violence and threats of violence. One participant shared how her vehicle was held hostage for three hours, and she was nearly forced to walk through the town while being harassed by drunk individuals. This episode was orchestrated by community leaders instigated by the former mayor. This experience highlights the intensity of the aggression and the tangible risks female politicians face.

Gender-Based Violence, Sexual Harassment and Slut-Shaming

We have briefly discussed this issue from the lenses of systemic factors when sexual harassment is used as means of blackmail to manipulate women by a colleague or superior. However, this section focuses on it at a broader scale.

The first way in which gender-based violence manifests in this context is slut-shaming defamation campaigns, inscribed in a conservative context. Two participants recounted incidents of being publicly slut-shamed by political opponents. Participant P2.3 explained how a mayor circulated an audio recording implying she had gained political support by sleeping with influential figures, stating, *"[The mayor] said, 'If she wants to be mayor, she has to sleep with me. This woman has the leaders' support because she sleeps with everyone.' And that audio circulated all over the town."* While intended to harm her reputation, she noted that it backfired, making the mayor look predatory and bolstering support for her campaign. Similarly, participant P1.4 was accused of being a 'husband stealer.' She recalled, *"They made a video saying I was a 'husband stealer.' Dude, I don't even have a boyfriend. Whose husband am I going to steal?"* She noted that this attack provoked a positive reaction from voters, who rallied around her, strengthening her campaign.

Interestingly, both participants perceived that these gendered attacks had the unintended effect of motivating other women to support their campaigns, suggesting that there is growing voter intolerance towards such behavior. However, the support was based on the reputation that these two candidates have, and not on supporting sexual freedom of women, linking to the profound differences in expectations between men and women. Participant P1.1 noted that male politicians are often celebrated for engaging in social activities that would be considered unacceptable for women in leadership positions. For instance, she recounted how male mayors could casually spend Friday evenings at local cantinas, surrounded by male supporters drinking beer and rum, without it affecting their reputation. Women, on the other hand, face much

stricter scrutiny. *"I can't do that because I have my family, I have my daughters, I have my husband, and I can't do such a thing,"* she said, emphasizing the double standard imposed on female politicians. Participant P1.3 expressed the need to conduct her actions in a way that was beyond reproach, or as she put it, 'not to give papaya,' a Colombian expression meaning not to give others an opportunity to criticize or take advantage of one's actions. The scrutiny placed on women in leadership positions was far greater than that on their male counterparts, forcing women to be excessively cautious in their behavior and decisions.

This skepticism towards women in politics is exacerbated by deeply ingrained sexist attitudes, both from men and women. Participant P1.3 recalled that, during her campaign, many people questioned her capability simply because the municipality had never been governed by a woman. *"There were people who said, 'the one who's really going to govern is her husband, because he has been in politics before,'"* she recalled. Her political opponents exploited these stereotypes to sway voters, making it challenging for her to prove her autonomy and competence.

Some participants felt that women themselves were not always supportive of other women in politics. As participant P1.1 remarked, *"We women should support each other. But what I see is that among us, we don't give each other the support we need. Instead, we criticize each other even in the height of our heels"* Participant P1.3, for example, observed that even though some voters' attitudes had become less aggressive over time, many still believed that women were incapable of governing simply because of their gender.

These voters' attitudes to broader patriarchal structures can be linked to Rita Segato's analysis on patriarchy as a system that oppresses women, and that is internalized and reproduced by both men and women. This dynamic was evident in the way participants described the deeply entrenched cultural norms that shaped voters' views on female leadership. These norms, passed down through generations, reinforce the idea that leadership is inherently masculine, making it difficult for women to gain the same respect and authority as their male counterparts.

These elements highlight the persistence of patriarchy in political life, where even well-qualified women must continuously navigate a system that questions their legitimacy and capabilities. Women are held to higher standards and subjected to greater scrutiny, forcing them to work harder to prove themselves in a political arena still largely shaped by male-dominated structures.

Gender Attitudes in the Face of Contextual Obstacles

Infrastructure emerged as a major concern in rural communities, with several mayors mentioning it when discussing the challenges they faced during their campaigns. Although their responses did not directly address gender issues, they revealed underlying aspects related to gender dynamics. For instance, during a 'pacific' protest orchestrated by community leaders due to disagreements over a contract, participant P1.4 was detained, verbally assaulted, and received threats against her and the family members who accompanied her.

> *"All of it was to destroy me. For example, that strike, the last strike they did to me made me very sad. That really broke me. In the four years, it was the only time they broke me (...) because with women they are more...brave. They don't do that to a man, and people themselves say it, 'they don't do everything they did to you to a man.' They don't do it. It's only for being a woman. But had it been a man? (...) They invite him to have a whiskey and to solve things around the table."*

The differences in treatment and microaggressions faced by women in political and professional settings are evident in many situations. Mayor P1.4 recounted an experience in which she was discussing a topic with a group of soldiers when a higher-ranking officer arrived. He greeted all the men present by shaking their hands and making direct eye contact, but he completely ignored her. Reflecting on the incident, she noted how deeply it affected her, causing her to become visibly upset. Although she did not confront the officer at the time, when asked by the major she was originally speaking to, why she had become so angry, she explained, *"Didn't you notice that he didn't even look at me? He ignored me; he didn't even greet me."*

The participant recalled how often she experienced similar episodes, but over time, she *"stopped staying silent. Afterward, I would say, 'Good morning, good afternoon, good evening. How are you?' But the problem is that kind of mistreatment becomes normalized. And it bothers me that people think it's an exaggeration. 'What do you mean mistreatment?' No, you have to call it out."*

Such responses illustrate how normalized disrespect towards women can become, especially in professional settings. What may be dismissed as minor slights or oversights are, in fact, reflective of deeper gendered perceptions. Women are often expected to tolerate or brush off

such behavior, whereas a man in the same position might receive more immediate recognition or support.

Clientelism vs. Bottom-Up Support

Clientelism, refers to the exchange of goods, services, or benefits for political support, particularly votes. This exchange creates a transactional relationship between politicians (patrons) and citizens (clients), where political support is contingent on the delivery of particularistic benefits.[80] A study carried out by the *Universidad de los Andes* cited in Fergusson, Molina and Riaño[81] found that clientelist vote buying is relatively common in Colombia, with estimates indicating that nearly one in five respondents engaged in such practices. From conversations in the field, it seems like this dynamic operates at a community leader level and the abundance of resources needed to purchase those votes implies that it is often the already wealthy and powerful who have more chances in succeeding. From the conversations with the participants, three different ways to navigate and overcome this informal but normalized system were identified. This involved using strategies of bottom-up support at different levels.

Firstly, this strategy played a crucial role in gaining the support of community leaders and council members. In clientelist electoral systems, community leaders, farm or finca owners, and factory owners often hold significant sway over how their workers vote. These decisions are frequently shaped by under-the-table deals between the leaders and local elites or ruling political parties. The nature of these deals varies: in some cases, it involves the administration of specific resources or the promotion of certain policies, while in others, it can involve securing positions in the council. In more extreme cases, it entails buying votes, with money going either to the community leader or being divided among workers and their families.

Participant P1.4 provided the most detailed account of navigating this context. Her strategy involved directly engaging with key sectors in the municipality that traditionally supported the opposing movement. Rather than relying on deals with community leaders, she spoke directly to the workers themselves. Familiar with clientelist dynamics, the workers often asked what

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[80] Fergusson, L., Molina, C., Riaño, J. F. (2018). "I Sell My Vote, and So What? Incidence, Social Bias, and Correlates of Clientelism in Colombia." *Economía*, *19*(1), 181–218. https://www.jstor.org/stable/90025866

[81] Encuesta Longitudinal Colombiana de la Universidad de los Andes (Longitudinal Colombian Survey - ELCA). Ibid. p.183

concrete rewards they would receive in exchange for their votes. Her response – that they would get her time and commitment – was initially met with amusement, as it diverged from the material incentives they expected. However, this approach helped her establish personal relationships with the workers, who eventually supported her organically. With this grassroots backing, she was then able to convince community leaders. After securing their support, she organized a community event, inviting municipal council members she sought to win over in order to gain the party's endorsement. Though the process was long, it proved highly effective, resulting in her overwhelming victory on election day.

Another aspect of bottom-up support was seen in campaign financing. While all participants expressed moral opposition to vote-buying, and a desire to 'do things differently' it was also a financial impossibility. So instead, they managed to finance their campaign through resource-based sponsoring. Common campaign expenses involve, costs for logistics, merchandise, publicity, event organization, and travel to rural areas. Most candidates had to rely on their personal assets, take out loans, or fundraise with the help of friends and family to cover initial expenses. For example, candidates P1.3 and P1.4, who were business owners, used their business earnings to finance their campaigns. However, when personal resources weren't enough, candidates turned to small business owners for support. These individuals would contribute in ways that didn't involve a significant economic burden, such as lending horses for door-to-door campaigning or covering the cost of coffee and food at campaign events. These contributions typically aligned with the supporter's existing business activities and did not involve any expectations of political favors in return. Candidate P2.1 emphasized this by expressing caution in accepting help, ensuring that no assistance would tie her to future obligations, thus avoiding entanglement in clientelist dynamics.

The third way in which candidates managed to overcome clientelist limitations and/or lack of party endorsement through bottom-up support, was by collecting signatures. As we've discussed, obtaining an endorsement from political parties is often fraught with obstacles. However, it is possible to make it onto the electoral lists by gathering the required number of signatures independently. Three of the interviewed mayors won their elections this way, while others, like Mayor P2.3, used this strategy in earlier campaigns. After achieving good results, political parties reached out to offer their endorsements, reinforcing the hypothesis that many parties initially avoid female candidates due to concerns that they won't attract enough votes. This perpetuates the exclusion and marginalization of women in politics.

Gender Roles and Network Support

When participants were asked about the factors that supported them throughout their journey into office, the majority highlighted the importance of family. The responses varied, with many pointing to the encouragement of parents, siblings, children, partners, and close friends. While family support was often crucial, traditional gender roles within domestic life frequently became a source of tension, particularly for married women.

Participant, P2.1, described the challenge of balancing political responsibilities with family life: "*One of the toughest things for a woman in politics is that homes are lost; you dedicate 100% to the work – going, coming back, and constantly being on call. You lose friends, lose family, and miss the chance to fully engage in your children's upbringing because your energy is entirely absorbed by work in the municipality.*"

For many women, sexist attitudes and ingrained gender expectations further complicated their personal relationships. Participant P2.3 shared a deeply personal account of the strain politics placed on her marriage. *"When I was running for election, I was under so much pressure – financially, emotionally. During that time, I found out my husband was unfaithful. It was incredibly difficult, but I kept it to myself because I thought if I brought it up, I'd get too depressed to continue. My children were with my mom, who was already upset with me for not being there. I rarely saw them. My sisters told me I had every right to be angry, but I just felt guilty, like I was ruining my home and my children.*"

Despite these struggles, participants also spoke of the unwavering support they received from family members. P2.3 recalled her father's encouragement: *"I sat down with my dad, and he told me, 'Give it a try. One last time. Let's see what happens.' I told him, 'This time, I'm going all in.'"*

Gender Expectations and Social Perceptions

Gendered expectations were not limited to the home but extended to how women were perceived in their roles. Many participants found themselves relying on the stereotype of women as effective administrators to persuade voters, even when they were highly qualified for their positions. This aligns with Anne Phillips' theory on the perception of women through a gendered lens. Participants P1.3 and P1.4, both with relevant experience and qualifications,

noted that they often felt compelled to 'tone down' their political ideas in order to fit into these societal expectations.

Societal pressure to conform to gendered norms was also a recurring theme. Participant P2.3 used Francia Márquez as an example of how women in politics are often expected to alter their behavior: *"Look at Francia Márquez[82] – yes, she has her own way of doing things. But she's a woman of her culture, her way of speaking, her way of being. Why should we force her to change? If she's always spoken and acted that way, why expect her to conform to someone else's standards? I say the same about myself. I've always been a mother. Why do I have to hide my children now that I'm in politics? I've never been wealthy; I've never had bodyguards – why should I change now?"*

The burden of family life was frequently cited as a significant obstacle for women in politics. Many participants described struggling with the "mental load" – the invisible, constant responsibility of managing both a household and a career. Participant P2.3 highlighted the disparity in how men and women navigate the balance between political life and family responsibilities. *"The man says, 'I'm leaving,' and his wife stays with the children. He goes into politics without a second thought. But for women, it's different. I get up at five-thirty, or even earlier, to make breakfast, get ready, and take the kids out. Then, I go to work with my packed lunch. Now, imagine a man – he might get up, go exercise, take a shower, and get dressed. That's the difference."* Despite these challenges, some women find pride in their ability to juggle both spheres, striving to maintain 'impeccable' homes while advancing their political careers, like it was the case for mayor P1.1.

A community-based approach could offer an alternative solution to the heavy burden placed on women balancing family and politics. For instance, local associations could mobilize to provide childcare support, or political parties and governments could introduce policies to fund childcare services for women in politics.

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[82] Francia Márquez is a Colombian politician and human rights activist known for her advocacy for environmental justice and the rights of Afro-Colombian communities. She gained prominence for her work against mining and extractive industries, and in 2022, she made history as Colombia's first Black woman Vice President, serving alongside President Gustavo Petro. Márquez has received several awards for her activism, including the Goldman Environmental Prize in 2018.

Psychological and Behavioral Factors – How Participants Act and React to Systemic and Social Factors

Reaction to Criticism and Aggressions

Reactions to the six different types of criticism and aggression identified above were mixed depending on how much different scenarios escalated, but no mentions were made of psychological damage in the first and second types of criticism when it was limited to discourse only.

In some instances, participants handled situations with humor or positivity. Participant P2.3 expresses the following about a defamatory brochure distributed on the streets (its content was not discussed in detail) *"So, at that moment, when all those pamphlets came out (…) I would go and collect them and say, 'come on, don't pollute the environment.' I mean, we always tried to 'take the trash out.'"* Similarly, in an episode where opposing groups threw cattle feces to the cars where participant P1.4 and her team were, she reacted by saying they were throwing 'fertility and abundance' at them.

Even though the comments found on social media were described as 'vulgar', 'grotesque', 'derogatory' and 'horrible', the response was sometimes similar when it came to discourse against them on media and social media. On the subject, participant P1.3 expressed: *"I feel that I came with a preparation perhaps on a personal level, to learn to handle that kind of things. So, of course, initially, those comments affected me, they caused discouragement. But in my case, I no longer paid attention, 'oh well, they wrote such a thing, oh well.'"* However, the response was different when her family was affected. *"But the people who are in one's environment, family especially… my daughters, they were very affected. (…) sometimes comments in school, using terms like 'that old woman,'[83] situations like that. So also teaching them how to handle that kind of situations. I think it was an experience for everyone on a family level, it was growth in that aspect."* Participant P2.3 in turn, felt the need to home-school her children for a period due to harassment directed against her children directly linked to her campaign.

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[83] Translation note: The phrase "la vieja esa" in Spanish literally translates to "that old woman" or "that old lady" in English. This expression carries a disrespectful and dismissive tone, that is not necessarily linked to age. In this context, it's used to refer to the participant in a derogatory way.

Nonetheless, many instances provoked a negative emotional response in the participants. When referring to a video a political opponent made slut-shaming her, participant P1.4 claimed *"it really brought my frequencies down a lot. So, I had to tell my team, watch the video with headphones elsewhere. Because I was trying to emotionally balance myself. And yes, that really brought my energy down a lot during those two days. (…) while I was trying to be strong, I had to tell them: 'Don't watch it. At least don't watch it in front of me, please.' Because… well, it's complex."*

When it came to performance, they perceived that criticism directed against them was disproportional to the one a male counterpart would receive in a similar situation. This is perceived as an injustice and is emotionally taxing. Participant P1.1 said in relation to the political counter alliance male politicians forged against her:

> *"The other three groups allied against me like they never had before. (…) I regretted getting into this story afterwards. I didn't think it was going to be like this because I had never seen that. I mean, in the thirty-seven years of municipal life that my municipality had, at that moment I had never seen such a barbaric attack as the one they did to me. And I always say wherever I go that they did it to me for being a woman, because no woman had ever reached the top position of the municipality, if not all were men. So, I think that their ego or machismo didn't let them be at ease, and that was a burden for them. But no, I never imagined it would be like this."*

Mental Health, Motivation Sources and Coping Mechanisms

The motivations and coping mechanisms expressed by participants reveal a complex interplay of personal development, faith, and emotional resilience as critical components in their political journeys. Participants emphasized the importance of maintaining a positive attitude as a foundational element in overcoming challenges. For instance, Participant P1.4 highlighted that her ability to regulate her emotions and sustain a positive mindset was essential for navigating the difficulties she faced in the political arena. This suggests that personal development is not merely a supplementary aspect but a vital prerequisite for success in a demanding field where emotional and psychological limits are often tested.

Faith emerged as another significant source of strength for participants. Many described a shift toward stoicism and mental preparation strategies that enabled them to manage their emotional responses to the inherent challenges of political life.

Moreover, the role of faith in participants' lives cannot be understated. The regular references to their Christian beliefs implied a collective understanding that faith provides emotional and psychological support during tough times. The mention of religious actors, particularly in relation to community engagement, suggests a potential avenue for fostering women's political participation at the local level. By connecting candidates with their faith communities, there may be opportunities for support networks that enhance their resilience and capacity to endure political challenges. They may also provide an avenue for fostering women's involvement in politics through faith-based community activities.

Philosophies that promote resilience, such as stoicism, were also mentioned as a coping mechanism or source of motivation: *"It's not that one doesn't let things slide, but also one takes some things to heart. There is a topic that helped me a lot with depression (…) I discovered stoicism. I would say, there are things I can control, there are things I cannot. Then I would say, I cannot control this. So, if I can't control it, let's take it in my favor. (…) And that philosophy helped me a lot."*

Simultaneously, this also points to the need of mental health resources for women in these positions in face of all the obstacles, aggressions and pressure they constantly encounter. Participant P2.3 went through a depressive episode in between her two campaigns, had to recur to private health care.

The same study by the Colombian Observatory for Women cited above[84] showed that 22.65% of the women candidates experienced stress, anxiety, or depression as a result of electoral violence, making it the most commonly reported consequence. Additionally, 13.27% felt that the incidents had a direct negative impact on their electoral outcomes. Interestingly, 11.97% mentioned that the experience strengthened their leadership skills, despite its challenges. However, 11% reported that the violence affected their ability to express opinions and communicate proposals, while 10.68% stated it negatively impacted their performance as candidates or team members. Other consequences included damage to their credibility and

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[84] Observatorio Colombiano de las Mujeres (2023) "Encuesta sobre la violencia contra las mujeres que participan en política. Balance participación políticca de mujeres en el proceso electoral 2023 " Colombia Potencia de la Vida. Recovered from
https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrIjoiYmI2NTQyMmYtYjZlNy00NDVjLWI2ZTItOTU5ZjI4YzkwNzYyIiwidCI6IjU3N2ZjMWQ4LTA5MjItNDU4ZS04N2JmLWVjNGY0NTVlYjYwMCIsImMiOjR9 on October 6, 2024

image with the electorate (9.39%), physical health impacts (7.77%), and restrictions on their ability to participate in campaign decisions (6.47%). A small proportion (3.88%) reported abandoning their campaigns altogether. Only 2.91% indicated that none of these consequences applied to them. Furthermore, when asked if they believed the violence decreased the likelihood of their campaigns achieving higher vote counts, 70.14% responded affirmatively, while 17.36% disagreed.

These results illustrate the profound psychological, professional, and personal effects of electoral violence on women candidates, impacting not only their well-being but also the outcomes of their campaigns. Stakeholders should make efforts to make mental health tools and support readily available for women in local politics.

Conclusion

This thesis has analyzed the factors influencing women's political representation at the mayoral level in Colombia. The theoretical framework established the importance of women's participation in politics and demonstrated that representation is a legitimate democratic concern, as highlighted by the works of Iris Marion Young and Anne Phillips. Their theories emphasize that a society cannot be truly democratic unless all constituents have equal opportunities for participation and access to representation. These ideas, further complemented by Rita Segato's insights into the dynamics of state institutions and the experiences of marginalized groups, provide a comprehensive understanding of the environment in which the seven female mayors in this study operate.

Colombian politics, like many other political systems, remains a hostile space for women, who often face multiple forms of aggression and discrimination due to their gender, social class, and other intersecting factors examined in this research. The inequality women experience is primarily fueled by systemic barriers that permeate all areas of their lives – identity, family, workplace, and home – shaping their strategies and behaviors as they adapt to these environments. These conditions are further exacerbated by Colombia's violent history of internal conflict, which has left a legacy of poor governance, insecurity, and entrenched power imbalances. This context increases women's vulnerability to various forms of attacks and marginalization.

The challenges faced by women in politics stem from deeply rooted social and familial expectations that place additional burdens on top of an already demanding career to systemic and physical violence. These pressures are exacerbated by a lack of support from their families or spouses, and by gendered expectations that require them to balance professional duties with traditional domestic roles. Additionally, women in politics are often subjected to disproportionate attacks from citizens, political opponents, and stakeholders—harassment that extends to both their public and private lives.

These attacks can manifest as social media harassment, political violence, and legal warfare, all of which are designed to undermine their credibility and limit their participation. Such hostile environments are made worse by the limited economic and institutional resources available to support these women, further affecting their physical and mental well-being. The

system, in essence, is structured to work against them at every level, creating a political minefield that they must navigate daily.

Compounding these issues is the broader context of poor governance, where existing legal protections and mechanisms are not only disregarded but often actively undermined. This results in a precarious landscape where women are left vulnerable to systemic discrimination, with little recourse to institutional support or justice. As a result, the obstacles they face are not just individual but are deeply embedded within the very structures of political and social systems.

Despite these challenges, women, as active agents, continue to find ways to navigate the political minefield created by centuries of exclusion and oppression. The mayors in this study employ strategies at personal, social, and institutional levels to overcome barriers and advocate for better conditions for women in politics. Whether by devising strategic alternatives to persuade political stakeholders, mobilizing popular support, overcoming financial constraints in launching and sustaining political campaigns or shifting gender perceptions, they effectively use a combination of tactics to advance their goals. All the while, they balance disproportionate domestic responsibilities, endure risks to their economic stability, and safeguard their mental health—often extending these sacrifices to protect their families.

This is an unjust price to pay, and it should not be the norm. Women should not be expected to sacrifice so much simply to exercise their right to access to political spaces. Their very presence in such positions, however, represents a victory and a step toward a more inclusive democracy. It underscores that a society cannot claim to be just if half of its population is systematically excluded from decision-making processes. Mayoral positions, often the most marginalized within the political hierarchy, offer a distinct perspective for observing these inequalities, as they tend to reveal the deeper, latent elements of oppression more clearly than higher political offices.

Addressing such disparities which stem from long-standing economic inequalities that have historically disadvantaged women, is crucial for leveling the playing field and creating fairer conditions for women's political participation. In this context, the role of government and political parties becomes evident—they must take affirmative actions and adopt proactive strategies to promote women's participation and ensure equal access to political opportunities.

The research also highlights the potential for civil society actors to intervene through community-based approaches, such as alleviating the burden of domestic labor, which is often relegated to women in the private sphere. Deconstructing existing gender roles is essential for encouraging women's engagement in public life, as participation in community activities has been shown to promote political involvement and challenge stereotypes. Moreover, these initiatives should target both men and women, as involving all members of society is vital for fostering lasting change and breaking down traditional gender norms.

In sum, this study underscores the importance of addressing systemic, social, and economic barriers that hinder women's participation in politics. By confronting these obstacles, Colombia can move toward a more equitable political landscape that truly represents the voices and experiences of all its citizens.

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Annexes

Annex 1 – Questionnaires for Primary Material

Questionnaire Guide (in English)

Opening the Interview

Introductions

- Small talk about their region, my trip to Colombia, asking about their municipality
- Introduce myself at a professional and a personal level
- Thank you for your time

Procedure

- First, I would like to emphasize that your participation in this research is a 100% voluntary and at any point you can stop your participation or ask me to remove a part of what you have said.
- Secondly, this interview is anonymous. No information included in the study will be traceable to you in any way. Only I will have access to this information and eventually my supervisor at my University of Sweden, but they will only have access to an anonymized version of the data.
- I will anonymize this data first by editing the original recording and removing any data that could be traceable to you. We will also avoid including any traceable information in the recording in the first place. When I start recording, I will not say your name. I will use the research code instead if necessary. I will also not mention your political party, municipality or region. The only qualifiers we could use, if you agree are general adjectives like "rural, small, large, etc," or any adjectives you feel necessary to understand the context of your answer. After the audio has been anonymized, I will transcribe it with the help of audio transcript tools with a strict confidentiality policy. Once my thesis is approved, I will destroy the recording materials.
- If you wish to, within one week of our meeting, I will send you the raw transcript of the interview and you will be able to review it and check if you would like to remove any segments or make any clarifications. Can we agree on a period of two weeks for reviewing the interview after I have sent you the transcript?
- I would also like to confirm that you received the documents and ask you if you have any questions regarding them.
- Do you have any other questions in general?
- Is it okay if I start recording now?
- Once the recording starts, say the participant's code and repeat the informed consent

Interview Variations

Group Codes

- P1 – Mayor Period 1
- P2 – Mayor Period 2
- C - Unsuccessful Candidate

Elected Mayors		Unsuccessful Candidates
2019-2023 (P1)	**2023-2027 (P2)**	**2019 (C1) 2023 (C2)**
Segment 1		
Segment 2		
Segment 2.1	-	-
Segment 3a	-	Segment 3b
Segment 4a	-	-
Segment 5		

Segment 1: Opening Questions

1. When did you first get involved in local politics?
2. What was your motivation to get involved?
3. What was your first experience in local politics?
4. What made you decide to run for mayor?

Segment 2: The Way into Office

1. What were your expectations about the election process before it started?
2. Were your expectations accurate?
3. What was different from your expectations?
4. Was 2019/2023 the first time you ran for office?
5. How many times had you attempted before?
6. Did you encounter any obstacles during your campaign(s) for mayor?
7. What was the nature of these obstacles? (i.e. economical, personal, environmental, political, social)
8. Were any of the obstacles you encountered related to elements you cannot change about yourself - who you are inherently? (i.e. skin colour, gender, etc.)
9. Were any of the obstacles you encountered related to how you present yourself? (i.e. clothes, way of speaking)
10. What was the nature of the elements that help you overcome the obstacles we just discussed?
11. What elements were the most useful to overcome these obstacles? (i.e. Institutions, NGO, networks, family)
12. Did you know of any tools available for female candidates when you started your campaign?
13. Did you learn about any tools during your campaign?
14. Did you learn about any tools after your campaign?
15. Did you use any of these tools? Which ones?
16. What was the biggest obstacle you encountered during your campaign?
17. How did you overcome it?

Segment 2.1a Transition to When in Office (P1)

1. What were your expectations about your mandate before you took office?
2. Were your expectations accurate?
3. What were the differences between your expectations and the reality?

Segment 3a: When in Office (P1)

1. Did you encounter any obstacles during your mandate as a mayor?
2. What was the nature of these obstacles? (i.e. economical, personal, environmental, political, social)

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3. Were any of the obstacles you encountered related to elements you cannot change about yourself - who you are inherently? (i.e. skin colour, gender, etc.)
4. Were any of the obstacles you encountered related to how you present yourself? (i.e. clothes, way of speaking)
5. What was the nature of the elements that help you overcome the obstacles we just discussed?
6. What elements were the most useful to overcome these obstacles? (i.e. Institutions, NGO, networks, family)
7. Did you know of any tools available for female candidates when you started your mandate?
8. Did you learn about any tools during your mandate?
9. Did you learn about any tools after your mandate?
10. Did you use any of these tools? Which ones?
11. What was the biggest obstacle you encountered during your mandate?
12. How did you overcome it?
13. What was/were the best experience(s) you had during your mandate?
14. Are there any elements we haven't discussed that you think are relevant?

Segment 3b: After the Elections

1. Why do you think you didn't win?
2. Do you identify any elements that would have made your campaign process more successful?
3. Did your lifestyle change significantly after the elections?
4. In what way(s)?
5. Are you still politically active?
6. In what way?
7. Do you plan to run for a public charge again in the future?
8. Will you run for mayor? Or will you run for a different public charge?

Segment 4a: After Office

1. Were the expectations from your mandate period fulfilled?
    a. How where they different from your expectations?
2. Are you still politically active?
    a. In what way?
3. Do you have any plans to run for a public charge in the future?
    a. Which type of public charge?

Segment 5: Demographic data

Age range
18-25
26-35
36-45
46-55
56-65
66-75
76-85
86-95
Ethnicity

_____

Social Class

_____

Questionnaire Guide (in Spanish)

Questionnaire in Spanish sent to P2 Participants

Apertura de la entrevista

Presentaciones

- Pequeña charla sobre su región, mi viaje a Colombia, preguntar por su municipio
- Presentarme a nivel profesional y personal
- Muchas gracias por su tiempo.

Procedimiento

- Te cuento cómo pensé que podíamos proceder
- En primer lugar, me gustaría enfatizar que tu participación en esta investigación es 100% voluntaria y en cualquier momento puedes detenerla o pedirme que elimine una parte de lo que digas.
- En segundo lugar, esta entrevista es anónima. Ninguna información incluida en el estudio será rastreable hasta ti de ninguna manera. Solo yo tendré acceso a esta información y, eventualmente, mi supervisor en mi Universidad de Suecia, pero ell asolo tendrá acceso a una versión anónima de la entrevista.
- Voy a anonimizar los estos datos primero editando la grabación original y eliminando cualquier dato que pueda ser rastreado a ti. También evitaremos incluir cualquier información rastreable en la grabación en primer lugar. Cuando empiece a grabar, no voy a decir tu nombre. Voy a usar solamente el código de investigación si es necesario. Tampoco voy a decir el partido político, municipio o región. Los únicos calificativos que podríamos usar, si estás de acuerdo, son adjetivos generales como "rural, pequeño, grande, etc." o cualquier adjetivo que considere necesario para comprender el contexto de su respuesta. Después de que el audio haya sido anonimizado, lo transcribiré con la ayuda de herramientas de transcripción de audio con una estricta política de confidencialidad. Voy a destruir los materiales de la grabación doce meses después de que mi tesis sea aprobada.
- Si quieres, dentro de una semana posterior a nuestra reunión, te puedo enviar la transcripción de la entrevista y pouedes revisarla y verificar si quieres eliminar algún segmento o hacer alguna aclaración. ¿Podemos acordar un período de dos semanas para revisar la entrevista después de que te haya enviado la transcripción?
- También me gustaría confirmar que recibiste los documentos y preguntarte si tiene alguna pregunta al respecto.
- ¿Tienes alguna otra pregunta en general?
- ¿Está bien si empiezo a grabar ahora?
- Una vez que comience la grabación, decir el código del participante y repita el consentimiento informado

Variaciones de la entrevista

Códigos de grupo
P1 – Alcaldesa Electa Período 1
P2 – Alcaldesa Electa Período 2
C – Candidata a Alcaldesa

Alcaldesas electas		Candidatas no exitosas
2019-2023 (P1)	2024-2027 (P2)	C
Segmento 1		
Segmento 2		
Segmento 2.1a	-	-
Segmento 3a	-	Segmento 3b
Segmento 4a	-	-
Segmento 5		

Segmento 1: Preguntas de apertura

1. ¿Cuándo te involucraste por primera vez en la política local?
2. ¿Cuál fue tu motivación para involucrarte?
3. ¿Cuál fue tu primera experiencia en la política local?
4. ¿Qué te hizo decidir postularte para alcaldesa?

Segmento 2: El camino a la oficina

1. ¿Cuáles eran tus expectativas sobre el proceso electoral antes de que comenzara?
2. ¿Tus expectativas fueron adecuadas?
3. ¿En qué se diferenció la realidad de tus expectativas?
4. ¿Fue 2019/2023 la primera vez que te postulaste para un cargo?
5. ¿Cuántas veces lo habías intentado antes?
6. ¿Encontraste algún obstáculo durante tu(s) campaña(s) para alcaldesa?
7. ¿Cuál fue la naturaleza de estos obstáculos? (por ejemplo, económico, personal, ambiental, político, social, etc.)
8. ¿Alguno de los obstáculos que encontraste estaba relacionado con elementos que no puedes cambiar sobre ti misma, quién eres inherentemente? (por ejemplo, color de piel, género, origen etc.)
9. ¿Alguno de los obstáculos que encontraste se relacionó con la forma en que te presentas? (es decir, ropa, forma de hablar, etc.)
10. ¿Cuál fue la naturaleza de los elementos que te ayudan a superar los obstáculos que acabamos de discutir?
11. ¿Qué elementos fueron los más útiles para superar estos obstáculos? (es decir, instituciones, ONG, redes, familia, etc.)
12. ¿Conocías alguna herramienta disponible para las candidatas cuando empezaste tu campaña?
13. ¿Te enteraste de alguna herramienta durante tu campaña?
14. ¿Te enteraste de alguna herramienta después de tu campaña?
15. ¿Usaste alguna de estas herramientas? ¿Cuáles?
16. ¿Cuál fue el mayor obstáculo que encontraste durante tu campaña?
17. ¿Cómo lo superaste?

Segmento 2.1a Transición a su mandato (P1)

1. ¿Cuáles eran sus expectativas sobre tu mandato antes de asumir el cargo?
2. ¿Tus expectativas fueron adecuadas?
3. ¿Cuáles fueron las diferencias entre tus expectativas y la realidad?

Segmento 3a: Durante el Mandato (P1)

1. ¿Encontraste algún obstáculo durante tu mandato como alcaldesa?
2. ¿Cuál fue la naturaleza de estos obstáculos? (por ejemplo, económico, personal, ambiental, político, social, etc.)
3. ¿Alguno de los obstáculos que encontraste estaba relacionado con elementos que no puedes cambiar sobre ti misma, quién eres inherentemente? (por ejemplo, color de piel, género, origen etc.)
4. ¿Alguno de los obstáculos que encontraste se relacionó con la forma en que te presentas? (es decir, ropa, forma de hablar, etc.)
5. ¿Cuál fue la naturaleza de los elementos que te ayudan a superar los obstáculos que acabamos de discutir?
6. ¿Qué elementos fueron los más útiles para superar estos obstáculos? (es decir, instituciones, ONG, redes, familia, etc.)
7. ¿Conocías alguna herramienta disponible para las candidatas cuando empezaste tu campaña?
8. ¿Te enteraste de alguna herramienta durante tu campaña?
9. ¿Te enteraste de alguna herramienta después de tu campaña?
10. ¿Usaste alguna de estas herramientas? ¿Cuáles?
11. ¿Cuál fue el mayor obstáculo que encontraste durante tu campaña?
12. ¿Cómo lo superaste?
13. ¿Cuáles fueron las mejores/la mejor experiencia(s) que tuviste durante tu mandato?
14. ¿Hay algún elemento que no hayamos discutido que consideres relevante?

Segmento 3.b: Después de las elecciones

1. ¿Por qué crees que no ganaste?
2. ¿Identificas algún elemento que hubiera hecho que tu proceso de campaña fuera más exitoso?
3. ¿Tu estilo de vida cambió significativamente después de las elecciones?
4. ¿De qué manera(s)?
5. ¿Sigues siendo políticamente activa?
6. ¿De qué manera(s)?
7. ¿Planeas volver a postularte para un cargo público en el futuro?
8. ¿Te postularás para alcaldesa? ¿O te postularás para un cargo público diferente?

Segmento 4a: Después del Periodo Electoral

¿Se cumplieron las expectativas de tu período de mandato?
¿Cuáles fueron las experiencias entre tus expectativas y la realidad?
¿Sigues siendo políticamente activa?
¿De qué manera(s)?
¿Tienes algún plan para postularse a otro un cargo público en el futuro?
¿Qué tipo de cargo público?

Segmento 5: Datos demográficos

Rango de edad

Rango		Rango	
18-25	☐	56-65	☐
26-35	☐	66-75	☐
36-45	☐	76-85	☐
46-55	☐	86-95	☐

Identidad étnica

_____

Clase social

_____

Annex 2 – Questionnaire for Secondary Material

English

1. Can you tell me a bit more about the work that your organization does for gender equality in local democracy?
2. Does your organization provide any tools, strategies or resources for women undertaking a political career?
3. What type obstacles do women face when running for mayors?
4. Does their ethnicity affect their possibilities to succeed?
5. Is it different from other positions? (i.e. councillors, parliamentarians)
6. What elements do women need to succeed in al electoral campaign?
7. Are there other systematic elements that influence female political participation? (i.e. corruption, nepotism, clientelism)
8. During the past 10 years, have there been any positive developments for women mayors in local politics?
9. During the past 10 years, have there been any negative developments for women mayors in local politics?
10. Is there anything we haven't talked about that you think is worth mentioning?

Spanish

1. ¿Puedes contarme un poco más sobre el trabajo que realiza su organización por la igualdad de género en la democracia local?
2. ¿Proporciona su organización herramientas, estrategias o recursos para que las mujeres emprendan una carrera política?
3. ¿Qué tipo de obstáculos enfrentan las mujeres cuando se postulan para alcaldes?
4. ¿Su origen étnico afecta sus posibilidades de éxito?
5. ¿Es diferente de otras posiciones? (es decir, concejales, parlamentarios)
6. ¿Qué elementos necesitan las mujeres para tener éxito en una campaña electoral?
7. ¿Existen otros elementos sistemáticos que influyan en la participación política femenina? (es decir, corrupción, nepotismo, clientelismo)
8. Durante los últimos 10 años, ¿ha habido algún avance positivo para las alcaldesas en la política local?
9. Durante los últimos 10 años, ¿ha habido algún desarrollo negativo para las alcaldesas en la política local?
10. ¿Hay algo de lo que no hayamos hablado que creas que vale la pena mencionar?

Annex 3 – Letter of Information

English

Research project: Fostering Women's Representation in Local Democracy: A Qualitative Analysis of the Factors Surrounding Female Political Participation in Colombia

What is this project about?

This project explores the difficulties faced by women who decide to pursue a political career at the local level. Seek also to understand what items or tools are helpful in overcoming those obstacles.

Who is funding this project?

This project is carried out with the help of the fieldwork grant of the Swedish International Center for Local Democracy (ICLD) that covers the researcher's travel and accommodation.

Why are you being contacted?

You have been contacted because you are directly involved in local democracy in Colombia and your experiences are critical to understanding the research question in the study.

How is this research conducted?

- Participation in this study is one hundred percent voluntary and you can withdraw at any time, as well as refuse to answer questions you are not comfortable with.
- Data will be collected in 60-minute semi-structured interviews with the researcher. The list of questions will be given to you prior to the interview.
- The respondent will have access to the transcript of their interview approximately one week after the interview and will have two weeks to add clarifications after receiving the transcript. At any time, you can ask for your answers to be partially or totally withdrawn from the research project.
- Participation may be discontinued at any time. No identifying information will be collected. Your answers will be anonymous.
- The information collected in this project will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the complete material. The project supervisor will have access to an anonymized version of the data.

Researcher: Laura Andrea De Alba Huerta. Master's student in Human Rights at Uppsala University. Email: laura-andrea.de-alba-huerta.1478@student.uu.se | phone number: +33 7 82 84 46 43

Supervisor: Helen Andersson | Associate Professor of Ethics and Director of Master Programme in Human Rights Studies | email: helen.andersson@uu.se

If you have any concerns regarding the conduct of this research or questions about Uppsala University's strategy on research ethics and good research practices, please contact Stefan Eriksson (stefan.eriksson@crb.uu.se), Advisor to the Vice Chancellor on Good Research Practices.

Spanish

Carta de información

Proyecto de investigación: Promoviendo la representación de las mujeres en la democracia local: Un análisis cualitativo de los elementos alrededor de la participación política de las mujeres en Colombia

¿Qué es este proyecto?

Este proyecto explora las dificultades que enfrentan las mujeres que deciden emprender una carrera política a nivel local. Busca también entender qué elementos o herramientas son útiles para superar esos obstáculos.

¿Quién financia este proyecto?

Este proyecto es realizado con ayuda de la beca de trabajo de campo del Centro Internacional Sueco para la Democracia Local (ICLD) que cubre viáticos y alojamiento de la investigadora.

La investigación es llevada a cabo como parte de la obtención del grado de maestría de la investigadora en la Universidad de Uppsala en Suecia. La universidad no proporciona ayuda financiera, pero es responsable por la supervisión de la investigación.

¿Por qué estás siendo contactada?

Has sido contactada porque estás involucrada de manera directa en la democracia local en Colombia y tus experiencias son fundamentales para entender la pregunta de investigación del estudio.

¿Cómo se lleva a cabo esta investigación?

• La participación en este estudio es cien por ciento voluntaria y en cualquier momento puedes retirarte, así como negarte a responder preguntas con las que no te sientas cómoda.

• Los datos se recopilarán en entrevistas semiestructuradas de 60 minutos con la investigadora. El formulario de preguntas será enviado antes de la entrevista.

• La entrevistada tendrá acceso a la transcripción de su entrevista aproximadamente una semana después de ésta y tendrá dos semanas para agregar aclaraciones después recibir la transcripción. En cualquier momento se puede pedir que se retiren parcial o totalmente sus respuestas del proyecto de investigación.

• La participación puede ser interrumpida en cualquier momento. Ningún tipo de información identificativa será recolectada. Las respuestas serán completamente anónimas.

• La información recolectada en este proyecto se almacenará de forma segura y solo la investigadora accederá al material completo. La supervisora del proyecto tendrá acceso a una versión anonimizada de los datos.

Investigadora: Laura Andrea De Alba Huerta. Estudiante de maestría en Derechos Humanos en la Universidad de Uppsala. Correo electrónico: laura-andrea.de-alba-huerta.1478@student.uu.se | número telefónico: +33 7 82 84 46 43

Supervisora: Helen Andersson | Profesor Asociado de Ética y directora de la Maestría en Derechos Humanos en la Universidad de Uppsala | correo electrónico: helen.andersson@uu.se

Si tiene alguna inquietud respecto a la realización de esta investigación o preguntas sobre la estrategia de la Universidad de Uppsala en materia de ética de la investigación y buenas prácticas de investigación, comuníquese con Stefan Eriksson (stefan.eriksson@crb.uu.se), asesor del vicerrector sobre buenas prácticas de investigación.

Annex 4 – Ethics Form

Ethical Guidelines for the Research Project "Fostering Women's Representation in Local Democracy: A Qualitative Analysis of the Factors Surrounding Female Political Participation in Colombia"

Definitions[85]

- "Researcher" refers to the student.

- "Participant" refers to the individuals participating in the research, from whom data will be collected.

- "Informed consent" means that research participants are provided with all necessary details to fully comprehend the research's objective, the implications of their participation, and the researcher's identity and role. It should be made clear to participants that they can withdraw their consent at any stage before the thesis is submitted, which covers both the data collection period and afterwards. The information should be presented in a manner that is easily understood by the participant. The consent should also clarify that participants' personal data will be collected, such as their name, profession, address, or any other potentially identifying details, although such information should only be collected under exceptional circumstances.

Ethical policy statement:

Researchers have an obligation to respect human dignity and to do no harm. Researchers shall respect their participants' integrity, freedom, and right to participate. Researchers have a duty to prevent research participants from being subjected to harm or other suffering as a consequence of their participation in research.

According to the Swedish Ethical Review Act, research carried out at a bachelor's or a master's level is not subject to previous ethical approval. Nevertheless, the researcher commits to the respect of the guidelines outlined in the Act, as well as the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity.

The present research will be carried out in the framework of the researcher's evaluation for master's Program in Human Rights at Uppsala University. The topic of the research is "Fostering Women's Representation in Local Democracy: A Qualitative Analysis of the Factors Surrounding Female Political Participation in Colombia."

It will deal with human participants and aims to collect new data by qualitative methods. The data will be collected through anonymous interviews with women or key actors involved in local democracy in

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[85]Definitions obtained from the Dept. of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University. Dept. of Peace and Conflict Research (2021) "Policy on Ethical Guidelines for Student Work" Uppsala University. Recovered from https://www.pcr.uu.se/digitalAssets/823/c_823874-l_1-k_ethicalguidelinesstudentwork.3dec2019.pdf on February 28th, 2024.

Colombia. The data will be anonymized through the highest possible degree and participants will be able to review the transcripts and withdraw their participation at any time.

Researcher's name: Laura Andrea De Alba Huerta

Email: l.andrea.dealba@gmail.com

Phone number: +33782844643

Date	Signature

If you have any concerns regarding the conduct of this research or questions about Uppsala University's strategy on research ethics and good research practices, please contact Stefan Eriksson (stefan.eriksson@crb.uu.se), Advisor to the Vice Chancellor on Good Research Practices.

Spanish

Pautas éticas para el proyecto de investigación "Promoviendo la representación de las mujeres en la democracia local: Un análisis cualitativo de los elementos alrededor de la participación política de las mujeres en Colombia"

Definiciones[1]

- "Investigador" se refiere al estudiante.

- "Participante" se refiere a las personas que participan en la investigación, de quienes se recopilarán los datos.

- "Consentimiento informado" significa que los participantes de la investigación reciben todos los detalles necesarios para comprender completamente el objetivo de la investigación, las implicaciones de su participación y la identidad y el papel del investigador. Se debe dejar claro a los participantes que pueden retirar su consentimiento en cualquier momento antes de la presentación de la tesis, lo que abarca tanto el período de recopilación de datos como el posterior. La información debe presentarse de una manera que sea fácilmente comprensible para el participante. El consentimiento también debe aclarar que se recopilarán los datos personales de los participantes, como su nombre, profesión, dirección o cualquier otro dato potencialmente identificable, aunque dicha información solo debe recopilarse en circunstancias excepcionales.

Declaración de política ética:

Los investigadores tienen la obligación de respetar la dignidad humana y de no causar ningún daño. Los investigadores respetarán la integridad, la libertad y el derecho a participar de sus participantes. Los investigadores tienen el deber de evitar que los participantes en la investigación sufran daños u otros sufrimientos como consecuencia de su participación en la investigación.

De acuerdo con la Ley de Revisión Ética de Suecia, la investigación realizada a nivel de licenciatura o maestría no está sujeta a aprobación ética previa. No obstante, el investigador se compromete a respetar las directrices recogidas en la Ley, así como el Código de Conducta Europeo para la Integridad de la Investigación.

La presente investigación se llevará a cabo en el marco de la evaluación del investigador para el Programa de Maestría en Derechos Humanos de la Universidad de Uppsala. El tema de la investigación es "Promoviendo la representación de las mujeres en la democracia local: Un análisis cualitativo de los elementos alrededor de la participación política de las mujeres en Colombia."

Tratará con participantes humanos y tiene como objetivo recopilar nuevos datos a través de métodos cualitativos. Los datos se recopilarán a través de entrevistas anónimas con mujeres o actores clave involucrados en la democracia local en Colombia. Los datos se anonimizarán en la mayor medida posible y los participantes podrán revisar las transcripciones y retirar su participación en cualquier momento.

Investigadora: Laura Andrea De Alba Huerta

Correo electrónico: l.andrea.dealba@gmail.com

Número de teléfono: +33782844643

Fecha	Firma

Si tiene alguna inquietud respecto a la realización de esta investigación o preguntas sobre la estrategia de la Universidad de Uppsala en materia de ética de la investigación y buenas prácticas de investigación, comuníquese con stefan.eriksson@crb.uu.se Stefan Eriksson (stefan.eriksson@crb.uu.se), asesor del vicerrector sobre buenas prácticas de investigación[2].

Annex 5 – List of Themes in Alphabetical Order

Achievements	Electoral Results	Institutional Support	Paternalism	Resilience
Background	Electorate's Attitudes	Instrumentalization of Women	Personal Development	Resource-Based Sponsoring
Bottom-up support	Emotional Elements	Involvement of Women	Physical Violence	Risks
Campaign support	Endorsement	Lawfare	Political Attacks	Security Measures
Clientelism	Explicit Gender Component	Legislative Instruments	Political Dynamics	Self-presenting
Community Activities	External Motivators	Lobbying	Political Elites	Sexist Attitudes
Contextual Obstacle	Faith	Media Attacks	Political Opponents	Sexual Harassment
Coping Mechanism	Family Affected	Menstruation	Political Reflection	Slut-shaming
Corruption	Financing	Mental Health	Political Relationships	Social Class
Counter-alliance	First Campaign	Mental Load	Political Role Models	Social Media
COVID	Future in Politics	Mentor	Political Scheming	Strategic Alliance
Criticism	Gender Attitudes	Micro-aggressions	Poor Governance	Strategy
Defamation	Gender Perception	Motivation	Popular Vote	Threats
Difference of Treatment	Gender Policies	Multiple Campaigns	Positive Outcome	Training
Direct Confrontation	Gender Roles	Network Support	Power Dynamics	Women in the Campaign
Domestic Elements	Ideals	Neutrality	Previous Involvement in Politics	Work Team
Domestic Responsibilities	Identified Opportunity	NGO	Private Life	
Domestic Violence	Imposter Syndrome	Participation in the Council	Public Sector Job	
Economic Independence	Indirect Campaign	Partner	Qualifications	
Education	Inherent Characteristic	Party	Quotas	