

Political violence against women in Peru:

Gender gap/ Differences in the perceptions of Congress members (2016-2019)

Violence against women' political life

“When a woman participates in politics, she should be putting her hopes and dreams for the future on the line, not her dignity and not her life” (Albright, 2016).- krook and restrepo 2016a

Abstract

The objective of this paper is TO ADVANCE THE DEBATE ON VAWP CONCEPT FORMATION BY EXPLORING PERU AS AN THE UNDERSTUDIED CASE / to explore Peruvian elites' perceptions on political violence against women in the context of the 2021 reform N° 31155.

To explore Gender differences in elite perceptions

Previous national research studies have been carried out focusing primarily on women's testimonies in relation to the electoral scenario, while some of them have looked at women serving in office at the subnational level.

In this paper, *political harassment* will be evaluated in relation to both the electoral and legislative contexts at the national level, while taking into account women and men's perspectives. The analysis will be based on 30 semi-structured interviews, in which women and men serving in the 2016-2019 National Congress could identify and speak about different forms of violence against women, occurring beyond electoral campaigns. A mixed-methods approach will be applied.

Results show gender similarities in relation to the most frequently identified forms of violence against women in both contexts. However, while for most men *political harassment* is occasional, especially in relations to the Congress, most women perceive it as a widespread issue, even though some of them dangerously refer to it as "the cost" of women doing politics.

Keywords: political harassment, political violence against women, political elites, democracy, Peru.

I. Introduction

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The next section will explore the concept formation of *political harassment*, combining both the process within the country and the ongoing international conversation. In section 3, the mixed method applied in the study will be discussed. In section 4, quantitative and qualitative findings will be presented. Finally, the discussion section will elaborate on the main findings and possible readings of the results, and it will be followed by a conclusion.

I. *Political violence against women: the conceptual framework - What is gender-based political violence against women*

The foundational conceptual framework to address this global concern is rooted in the inductive detection process the Bolivian Association of Regional and Municipal Councilwomen (ACOBOL) carried out since its creation in 1999 (Restrepo thesis). As soon as November 2000, during a seminar on Councilwomen in the National Lower House, the organization publicly denounced what it had identified as “political harassment and violence against women” (Rojas Valverde in iKnow Politics 2007, 16). This was a turning point for the launch of what became a far-reaching advocacy campaign that involved multiple stakeholders, endured for more than a decade and culminated in the adoption of Law 243 in 2012 for the protection of women in politics. A distinction was drawn between the hostile and systematic mechanisms that prevent women from fulfilling their political mandate, such as “acts of pressure, persecution, molestation and threats”, referred to as *political harassment*, and all those “acts, practices and aggressions” that cause direct “physical, psychological, or sexual” harm to women, understood as *political violence* (Law 243). Rather than trivialising the former set of practices compared with the latter, this differentiation intended to expose the

invisible and pervasive “atmosphere of (..) violence” that disguised the tools of sexist domination as the normal way of doing politics (Machicao Barberly 2004, 52). In this sense, the Bolivian conceptualization built upon the 1994 Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women (Convention of Belém do Pará), by stressing the category of physical, sexual and psychological harm, while, at the same time, unveiling a layer of complexity that needed to be further explored. Therefore, from the very beginning, it was apparent to women politicians that addressing their unequal political participation entailed unraveling the ties between these aggressions and their structural origins and implications. This linkage was made clear since the earliest draft of Law 243, where it was recognised that targets were attacked for being women and resisting the rationale of a patriarchal sexual division of labour that frames politics as a masculine domain (Machicao Barberly 2004, 25-27). This helped illuminate the pervasiveness of the phenomenon, even if ACOBOL had not yet named violence as a continuum. However, for Bolivian activists it was clear that “harassment always ends in violence” (Restrepo Sanin 2018, 112).

This early conceptualization resonated widely beyond Bolivia, while, over the years, the international conversation expanded, galvanizing stakeholders into action and catching scholars’ attention. One of the very first instances where the phenomenon made its appearance on the multilateral stage was within the 10th Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean. On that occasion, echoing the terminology pioneered by ACOBOL, the issue was formally designated as “*political and administrative harassment against women*”, (Quito Consensus, ECLAC 2007).

Similarly, feminist comparative scholars have contributed to the debate, in an effort to identify, measure and conceptually frame gender-based violence against politically engaged women. To clearly delineate the boundaries of the phenomenon, this section organizes this vast resulting literature into a three-fold classification. Under the proposed typology, early theoretical perspectives envisaged the phenomenon as a subset of political violence, and they focused on those infringements of electoral integrity that have gendered forms, motives and impacts. A second body of work offered insights as to why the issue should be considered a separate phenomenon affecting the public sphere; in this case, theorized as a subset of violence against women, violence is framed as a violation of personal integrity to be examined through a multidimensional lens. Finally, this classification identifies a third salient body of literature that examined the phenomenon as a subset of contemporary gendered colonial violence, highlighting the imbrication between personal integrity and

territorial-communal integrity.

Within the “electoral integrity” perspective, one proposed terminology was that of *gender-specific electoral violence* (Bardall 2011, 2013). Emerging from the traditional definitions of internal “electoral conflict and violence” (Fisher 2001)¹, the concept referred to attacks committed in electoral settings against female candidates, voters, activists and electoral workers, not necessarily for being *women*, but for being part of electoral processes intended to be delayed, undermined, restricted, impeded, or annulled (Bardall 2011, 9-12; Bardall 2013, 1-2). In line with traditional understanding of political violence, this standpoint maintains a focus on discrete acts of violence which involve the use of force during electoral campaigns in “unconsolidated democracies”, and are linked with identifiable gender-neutral intentions, bearing on the disruption of the electoral process (Bardall 2011, 3-5). However, it contributes to uncovering gender-specific forms and impacts of violence². A more recent advancement within this first perspective introduces the concept of *gendered political violence* as a subset of the traditional definition of political violence (Bardall et al. 2019). This approach maintains a focus on discrete and intentional acts of violence and classifies them as political either because they target politicians (Hakansson 2023) or because they disrupt “the daily unfolding of political processes” (Bardall et al. 2019). The novelty rests in their operationalization, which stretches the parameters of electoral integrity to encompass institutional integrity - including elected authorities and not just candidates, while offering a neat tripartite framework for delineating when *political violence* becomes *gendered*. In this conceptualization, gender will either shape the forms, the impacts or the expressed motives of the attack (Johnson-Myers 2023?). The discussion about the intentionality behind those acts is particularly thriving as it accounts for the preservation of traditional “gendered hierarchies of political power” and protection of dominant positions of individuals who embody hegemonic

¹ The traditional approach to *political violence* has comprised two main research streams: the first one is concerned with internal conflict settings where no single actor holds “an undeniable monopoly of violence” (Kalyvas 2006, 23), while the second examines peace-time contexts in which an incumbent government is challenged (Besley & Persson 2011). Traditional research work primarily addresses discrete intentional outbursts, giving priority to physical damage and life loss, while circumscribing the issue to contexts of weak political institutions. This approach assesses the ascertainable motivations (such as, individual vs collective violence; strategic vs non-instrumental), forms (massive vs selective; co-ordinated vs spontaneous) and consequences (deadly vs compliance-seeking or coercive) concerning violent acts (Kalyvas 2006). With these premises, the political violent attacks taken into consideration comprise electoral conflicts, political assassinations, riots, internal extermination and mass deportation, which reflects political violence has traditionally been framed from a white masculine point of view, while alternative perspectives have been dismissed (Bardall et al. 2019).

² Accordingly, it re-signifies three traditional categories of political violence (a. physical/sexual, b. socio-psychological and c. economic) by adding the gender dimension into the analysis, and it theorizes that these attacks ultimately reinforce traditional gender stereotypes and drive women away from political involvement. It also uncovers gender gaps in traceability and expands spatial boundaries of political violence, including the private domain (Bardall 2013, 9-23).

masculinity (Bardall et al. 2019, 923). In this sense, gendered political violence targets not only women's bodies, but also those of men not conforming with hegemonic masculinity, as well as individuals who challenge heteronormativity.

Shifting to the academic perspectives that examine violence as a violation of personal integrity, we find *violence against women in politics (VAWIP)* as a concept that has achieved a prominent global resonance (Krook 2020). The terminology first emerged among activists in South Asia to indicate attacks that specifically affected female politicians in that latitude (Asian Partnership International 2006). Later, by framing VAWIP within a rampant conservative backlash to the increasing presence of women in positions of power, through the enforcement of gendered electoral reparation mechanisms³, scholars' discussion uncovered the global pervasiveness of this "hidden problem"⁴ (Krook 2020, 4-8), moving away from previous approaches that pathologize it as exclusive to the global South. Theorized as a subset of *violence against women*, VAWIP became an excellent conceptual tool for giving a name to infringements affecting politically active women not for their personal views, nor for accidentally finding themselves in the midst of some contested electoral processes, but precisely *for being women* (Krook and Restrepo 2016B). In this way, it raised awareness of a separate phenomenon that could not be subsumed under the traditional characterization of issue-based political attacks; by underlining their distinction, their co-existence could be taken into account (Krook 2020, 90-91).

By declining to conflate violence with the use of force or narrow it to isolated incidents, this comprehensive approach helped unpack the continuity between a wide range of acts, while identifying a common driver: to clash against women's accomplishments in *descriptive representation*⁵ and to push them back out of politics. Retrieving the feminist concept of a *continuum* of systematic abuse against women, here violent behaviour is not conceptualised as an outcome, but as a process, so that it is captured in its multidimensional spectrum of infringements that tend to overlap and escalate into severe, potentially fatal danger (Krook and Restrepo 2016a; Krook 2020). Taking prevailing categories of gender-based violence (physical, sexual, psychological and financial) as their underpinnings, Krook and Restrepo (2016a; 2020) constructed a comprehensive typology of mistreatment, incorporating an extra dimension they named semiotic violence. This last dimension allowed for the exposure of the most pervasive and silenced - yet deeply harmful - forms of violence, which render women

³ Gender quotas and gender parity.. (affirmative actions)

⁴ Explain the 4 gaps ?

⁵

incompetent or invisible, such as mansplaining, sexual objectification, physical segregation, or denying their right to speak (Krook 2022). In this way, this abuse is not dismissed as “quotidian practice of politics” or “quotidian injustice” (Bardall et al. 2019). This represented a key advancement because it denaturalised mistreatments that are especially socialized as the normal ‘cost of politics’, while problematizing the fact that targets were unable to receive adequate protection in time to stop their steady escalation (Alanis 2020).

This framework was, then, key to illuminating the structural violence that lies at the very origin of VAWIP, and that grounds on the ontological public/private divide and a sexual division of labour (Krook and Restrepo 2020, 97-99). This binary gender-based differentiation is contested because it has relegated women’s existence and projection within an intimate domestic sphere and it does not allow for transitions across the divide. Accordingly, VAWIP is identified as a tool for reinforcing that divide. In fact, operating as a gender-based “message crime”, it signals that women as a collective are inherently unsuitable for leadership positions, highlighting their status as *space invaders* (Puwar 2004) within the historically white, masculine domain of power and decision-making.

Finally, a third conceptual framework offers crucial insights into the imbrication between personal integrity and territorial-communal integrity within a colonial-modern⁶ matrix of power. By coining the term *gender-based territorial political violence* (GTPV), Souza and Biroli (2023) offer a terminology that is relevant to geographies where gendered colonial structures are entangled with routinized extractivism and territorial appropriation. Building upon Matos’s (2022) localised approach to political violence against women, they move beyond existing global conceptualizations that have addressed violence as the use of force aiming at procedural disruption, and even beyond violence as a violation of personal integrity with group-based disciplinary repercussions. Instead, they explore those attacks which have a dual center of gravity: women’s bodies as extensions of their territoriality and the communal territories as an extension of women’s embodied identity. Building upon Segato’s rich lexicon emerging from her diagnosis on extreme gendered violence in the public space, we can claim that here violence against politically active women is regarded as an act of “conquestuality” (Segato 2016, 621), as a way of capturing a systematic neo-colonial seizure of bodies and territories that cause a multilayered dispossession. In this case, violation of personal integrity translates into direct collective harm: not only singular women’s bodies are targeted, but also the community as a whole, with its land, resources and historical project (Segato 2018). In

⁶ Segato (2016, 5) used the “term “colonial-modern” to underscore the necessity of the “discovery” of America as the condition of possibility of modernity, as well as of capitalism.”

fact, studies uncover that the violent subjugation of women embodying leadership within their community bears on the dismantling of community resistance to territorial depredation and to the neoliberal extractivist project (Souza and Biroli 2023; Dos Santos Pereira et al. 2022).

This same perspective is invoked by authors that address the articulation of violence and dispossession within gender necropolitical dynamics (Diaz Bonilla 2020; Matos 2022). The literature shows necropolitics produce “gendered zones of abjection, of non-being” (Félix de Souza 2019, 101), in other words, racialised erasable social spaces where the killing of female and feminised bodies become a naturalised activity within democratic procedures. In Latin America, the erasability of these subjects is configured around the persistent exposure to new events of victimization and the accumulative naturalization of state denial, impunity and lack of protection (Diaz Bonilla 2020). Following Mbembe’s (2003) claims, in these racialised “gendered zones of abjection”, the violent dispossession of bodily sovereignty intersects with the loss of a territory/ancestrality, constituting a continuum of political violence that span across loss of political status, till the erasability of their lives. Then, the dispute over their embodied territoriality/territorial corporality reflects a dispute over a territory of political enunciation (Koch et al. 2024). This dispute condenses in the duality of the concept of *body-territory* mobilised by indigenous/‘community-based’ feminism, and serves as a cornerstone of this framework (Souza and Biroli 2023). In fact, body-territory is the locality for the configuration of extreme violence: it is where feminised bodies and territories are reached by neo-colonial “extended extractivism”⁷ (my transl., Gago 2019, 107), they are confronted by its pervasive repertoires and turn into targets. However, *body-territory* also represents a site of women’s collective organised resistance and a nest for differentiated *political enunciation*, which is simultaneously embodied and territorially rooted (Souza and Biroli 2023; Gago 2019).

This image is particularly powerful as it exposes the artificiality of the legitimacy the *public sphere* holds for determining the contours of political engagement and, in turn, the boundaries of gender-based political infringements. Invoking Segato’s critique of this domain as a gendered colonial-modern artifacture, we can differentiate it from *the political*. She elucidates that the current *public sphere* emerged with the establishment of colonial-modern gendered

⁷ Current forms of this hyperbolic extractivism described by Gago (2019) are not limited to the extraction of natural resources, but also include the exploitation of urban marginalised areas, housing market disruptions, and financial and digital depredatory practices.

binarism⁸, a process through which the colonial white masculine subject got the materiality of his body removed and its embodied specificity was turned into disembodied universality (Segato 2016, 2018). In this way, the self configured as “*the One*” totalizing subject of humanity could gather distance from the *embodied other* - “feminine, nonwhite, colonial, marginal, underdeveloped, deficient” (Segato 2016, 617). His subjectivity being constituted as pure rationality, the colonial-modern masculinity could establish his own prerogative “to produce critical, reliable knowledge about the world, as well as adequate policies to organise, govern and secure the individual and collective bodies that populate this world.” (Félix de Souza 2019, 98). With these premises, a patriarchal-modern public sphere was constructed based on the “ontological fullness” (Segato 2016, j.a., 617) of an abstract masculine subject, as opposed to a female embodied specificity which, in turn, was confined in a brand-new *intimate* domestic domain, as the pre-colonial domestic field was stripped of its previous differentiated *politicity*⁹. Along with the *privatization* of the communal domestic sphere, the embodied other was *minoritized*: cloistered as residual *anomaly*, marginalized as *defective* of the universal subject, and reduced to a *minority* of “bodies under tutelage” (Segato 2016; 2018; Félix de Souza 2019). As women were dispossessed from their ontological fullness as subjects of political enunciation and marked with a compulsory embodied specificity, the colonial-modern *public sphere* could hijack all political expressions and claims (Segato 2016).¹⁰

While acknowledging that colonial-modernity and its binary artifacts work as “a machine for producing anomalies and organizing purges” (Segato 2018, 204), this approach to political violence stresses the need for addressing attacks on women that are politically engaged both inside and outside formal political institutions. This includes women community leaders, indigenous representatives, environmental activists and human rights defenders, while taking into account embodied-territorially-rooted spaces of political enunciation that transcend the colonial-modern boundaries. Accordingly, rather than focusing on the violent reaction to women “invading” (Puwar 2004) an alien public sphere made of institutional facilities, party structures, electoral campaigns and incumbency activities, this perspective theorized GTPV

⁸ This was in replacement to the pre-colonial system of gender dualism which, despite being hierarchical, allowed for trans-movements following horizontal reciprocity (Segato 2016).

⁹ Despite not providing any explicit definition, Segato refers to it for describing women’s public discourse, priorities and activities related to managing resources, resolving conflicts and making decisions that will impact the community/collective.

¹⁰ As the colonial-modern public sphere came to represent “the locus of enunciation for all politically valued speech”, Segato claims that “women’s public discourse and activity will require a form of drag, a transformation of self to fit the requirements of the public sphere’s rules of etiquette and masculine style.” (Segato 2016, 617).

as the mechanisms for reinforcing women's historical dispossession of their ontological fullness as subjects of political enunciation. It follows that aggressions are functional for controlling, disciplining, even instrumentalizing women's engagement with *the political*, no matter if they are taking up office, or getting involved outside formal institutions. Following this logic, then, we can claim that this last framework do not imply that violence against politically active women aims only for hindering their presence in the public domain: rather, it is suggested that GTPV serves for the hijacking or thorough erasure of any space of political enunciation, being either inside and outside institutionalised politics, that is dysfunctional to the rationale of "patriarchal-colonial modernity" (Segato 2018, 200).

II. *Violence against women in politics: its concept formation process in Peru // concept timeline // narrative dispute*

(Extra interviews with Diana Miloslavich, Sandra Rojas Sandoval, Katya Samallona, Nery Saldarriaga, Diana Parraga)

--falta: mentioning the discursive dispute of the concept of political violence against women from Fujimorismo

In Peru the debate around violence against women's political life had not shielded /steered away from the international conversation, rather the opposite. The country has played a significant role in the unfolding of that conversation, not only for offering the scenery for consensus in key international meetings, but also for engaging with early definitions and categories. One year after the adoption of the first national affirmative action instrument ⁴, women local elected authorities started getting together across the Ayacucho region and from those early gatherings they ended up establishing the first regional Network of Women Councilors (Red de Regidoras de la Región Ayacucho). The intended purpose of the space was to facilitate mentoring and conducting training on political and administrative procedures; soon, it became also a place for personal testimonies of manifest hostility being put forward and addressed (Interviews 2025!). Similar groups were created in other regions (...) with the support of local feminist organizations, especially the *Centro de la Mujer Peruana Flora Tristán* and the *Movimiento Manuela Ramos*, and in 2008 all networks gathered around a national platform called RENAMA, or the National Network of Women Authorities (Interviews 2025!).

The newly established platform had a defining role in placing *political harassment and violence against women* at the centre of a conversation, even beyond the national borders.

This was possible through an international articulation that gave rise to RED LAMUGOL, the Latin American Network of Associations of Women Authorities within the Local Government, in 2008. The 2010 Lima Declaration (Pronunciamiento de Lima) was an important outcome of this early articulation process: it was adopted at the first LAMUGOL meeting for the Andean Region, celebrated in Peru, and it gathered the concern of the national associations of women local elected authorities for Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru itself, together with other supporting organizations, around the issue of “violence affecting women candidates and women in office” (my transl.), among others (Red LAMUGOL and RENAMA 2010).

RENAMA also contributed to advancing the discussion around the conceptual dimensions of this type of gendered violence. In 2011 the platform promoted the very first study on the matter in the country, sponsored by Centro Flora Tristán, Diakonía Perú and Calandria: it was a qualitative piece of research based on 187 testimonies of local elected officials at the regional and municipal level, and despite not generating detailed statistical results for each category of violence, its final report was crucial for revealing the complexity of the phenomenon in the country and its diverse and overlapping manifestations (Quintanilla Zapata 2012). The identified forms of violence were classified as: 1.) “defamation of a sexual, patrimonial or intellectual nature”; 2.) “interference with regulatory functions, or functions related to representation, oversight, or the request for information”; 3.) “acts of psychological violence, threats against integrity, physical attacks, and sexual violence”; 4.) “systematic obstruction of their initiatives and proposals”; 5.) “interceptions or other forms of violating their personal communication”; 6.) “induce administrative errors”; 7.) “schedule meetings at times and places that would hinder effective participation”; 8.) “unfounded accusation of a crime or administrative offense” (Flora Tristán 2015, 2). It is worth highlighting that the document was the basis for developing the first legislative initiative on the matter (the Initiative 1903/2012-CR), which was presented to Congress in February 2013.

In 2014 the conceptualization process of *political harassment* in Peru moved beyond women's organizations, when the National Electoral Jury (JNE) decided to carry out an exploratory survey targeting candidates that participated in the 2014 Regional and Municipal Elections (Pinedo et al. 2017, 33-50). The violent acts which were taken into consideration in the study were defined as: 1. “pressure (the act of putting effort on making you say or do something, or not say or not to do something)”; 2. “harassment (the act of bothering or ridiculing as an effort for making you say or do something, or not to say or to do something)”; 3. “threat (gestures or words that suggest or indicate an intention to cause harm)”; 4. “stalking (the act of tailing or chasing in an overt or concealed way)”; 5. “physical violence (the act of hitting,

pulling, scratching, biting, kicking or otherwise causing bodily damage or that could lead to death”); 6. “psychological violence (the act of insulting, shouting, not answering, sending official responses/answers beyond the established deadlines, or responses that harm your personal value and other acts that cause damage to your capabilities as a person)”); 7. “sexual violence (sexual advances and inappropriate friction, touching intimate parts of your body without consent, penetration by force against your will, among other acts that hinder your intimacy)” (own translation).

Questionnaires were applied to both women and men alike, and presented a list of possible explanatory factors, including gender, ethnic identity, sexual orientation, age, among others (95-99). In this way, the study would explore what gendered violence affected women politicians, while evaluating other forms of discrimination. On that occasion, the survey involved 503 out of the 1524 women candidates and indicated that 26.4% of them had experienced *political harassment* during the last campaign (45-47). In other words, three out of ten women were targeted. Moreover, it was observed that only 34% of them filed a complaint, and that the 82% of the complainants considered that the procedure gave no results (Cueva Hidalgo et al. 2017).

During the 2014 Regional and Local Elections, the JNE began working on a mechanism for responding to *political harassment*, while there was still no legal framework that would work as a reference for its detection at the national level. A refined reporting procedure started working during the 2016 General Election campaigns, finding its ground on the Regulations on Electoral Campaigning, State Advertising, and Neutrality during the Electoral Period (Resolution No. 304-2015-JNE); for that reason, it could only be applied to electoral advertising that affected candidates’ good reputation (Pinedo et al. 2017, 51-59). That year, out of the 1267 women campaigning three candidates reported being victims of *political harassment*; however, no administrative sanctions procedure was triggered in any of the three (Pinedo et al. 2017, 61-62; INFOgob 2016). Despite that, in the subsequent round of surveys examining the 2016 General Elections, JNE’s data illustrated that 49% of women candidates had experienced some form of *political harassment* (Pinedo et al. 2017, 63-67).

In that same period, RENAMA continued to have a leading advocacy role in terms of raising awareness on the phenomenon, while the Initiative 1903 could not find room for discussion in Congress. In March 2015, for example, the platform organised a demonstration in front of the national Congress, coinciding with a thematic plenary session on women's political rights;

however, even on that occasion, the Initiative 1903 presented in 2012 could not be debated (Pinedo et al. 2017). On the contrary, in that same year, important steps forward were achieved at the international level: the *Declaration of the Organization of American States on political harassment and violence against women* was adopted at the VI Conference of the Belém do Pará Convention held in Lima in October, and it defined both issues as:

“any action, conduct or omission among others, based on their gender, individually or collectively, that has the purpose or result of impairing, annulling, preventing or restricting their political rights, violating the rights of women to a life free of violence and to participate in political and public affairs on an equal footing with men.” (OAS 2015)

This definition became the main reference for the new configuration of the concept in Peru, when a new legislative initiative was drafted (673/2016-CR) with the support of RENAMA and its allies. This project was presented to the National Congress in November 2016, but it was not approved due to opposition in the parliamentary commission of Justice (Miloslavich Túpac 2018).

The following year, the Committee of Experts of the Follow-up Mechanism for the Belém do Pará Convention adopted the Inter-American Model Law for preventing, punishing and eradicating *violence against women in political life* at its meeting in Mexico (OAS 2017). In this last international agreement, the concept formation process moved towards a broader definition that would embody the multidimensional and overlapping nature of the abuse. In this way, different categories were incorporated into the definition of *violence*, ranging from physical attacks to economic and symbolic harm:

“any action, conduct or omission, carried out directly or through third parties that, based on their gender, causes harm or suffering to one or several women, and whose purpose or result is to impair or annul the recognition, enjoyment or exercise of their political rights. Violence against women in political life may include, among others, physical, sexual, psychological, moral, economic or symbolic violence.” (OAS 2017, 23)

In the last legislative initiative (3978/2018-CR) to be presented before its approval into law on April 7 of 2021, the term *political harassment* was maintained, while the definition aligned with the Inter-American Model Law's. That same year, the JNE carried out its second survey on *political harassment* focusing on candidates participating in the 2018 Regional and Municipal Elections. While the study revealed the persistence of the phenomenon during

electoral campaigns (one every 4 women had been targeted), it also advanced the discussion about the different forms of violence that affect women's political rights: defamation and sexist humour, unfounded accusations, intimidation and obstacles to limit participation in meetings and events were the most common manifestations, while cases of physical, psychological and sexual violence could also be observed (DNEF-JNE 2020a).

A second survey was conducted during the campaigns for the 2020 Special General Elections, and it indicated an increasing level of reported cases. This time 52% of the candidates said they had been attacked, while being part of an indigenous community aggravates the situation (DNEF-JNE 2020a; 2020b).

Table 1.

PL / Año	Periodo legislativo	Título	Fecha presentación	Autoría	Grupo parlamentario	Apoyo RENA MA	Issue	Establece sanciones
12104/2025-CR	2021-2026	Ley que garantiza el ejercicio político de las mujeres sin acoso	15.08.25	Guido Bellido Ugarte	Podemos Perú		acoso contra las mujeres en la vida política // violencia contra las mujeres en la vida política no def	no
5842/2023-CR	2021-2026	Ley que modifica la ley n° 31155, ley que previene y sanciona la el acoso contra las mujeres en la vida política	05.09.23	JNE	n/a		violencia en razón de género contra las mujeres no def	sí (multas)
3121/2022-CR	2021-2026	LEY QUE INCORPORA EL INCISO H) EN EL NUMERAL 5.1, DEL ARTÍCULO 5 DE LA LEY N° 31155, LEY QUE PREVIENE Y SANCIONA EL ACOSO CONTRA LAS MUJERES EN LA VIDA POLÍTICA, PARA LA IMPLEMENTACIÓN DEL REGISTRO DE SANCIONADOS POR ACOSO CONTRA LAS MUJERES EN LA VIDA POLÍTICA	21.09.22	Jhakeline Katy Ugarte Mamani	Bloque Magisterial		acoso contra las mujeres en la vida política no def	no
1491/2021-CR	2021-2026	Ley de fortalecimiento de la prevención y sanción del acoso de las mujeres en la vida política	17.03.22	Ruth Luque Ibarra	Juntos por el Perú	sí	acoso contra las mujeres en la vida política no def	sí (multas)

6929/2020-CR	2020-2021	Ley para prevenir, sancionar y erradicar el acoso político	13.01.21	Yessica Marisela Apaza Quispe	Unión por el Perú		acoso politico def c (apartado acoso político)	no
3981/2018-CR	2016-2021 (2020)	Ley que modifica el artículo 9°, literal "i" e incorpora el artículo 43 en la Ley 28094 para erradicar el acoso político contra las mujeres en las organizaciones políticas	05.03.19	María Cristina Melgarejo Paucar	Fuerza popular		acoso politico e (no def)	no
3978/2018-CR	2016-2021 (2020)	Ley que previene y sanciona el acoso político contra las mujeres	05.03.19	Luciana Milagros León Romero	Célula Parlamentaria Aprista		acoso político def a	sí (faltas administrativas)
5276/2020-CR	2020-2021	Ley que fortalece la promoción de los derechos políticos de las mujeres y la lucha contra la violencia y el acoso a las mujeres en la vida política del país	19.03.20	Arlette Contreras Bautista	No Agrupados		violencia y acoso politico def a	sí (faltas disciplinarias y administrativas)
3939/2018-CR	2016-2021 (2020)	Ley que previene y sanciona el hostigamiento político	27.02.19	Patricia Elizabeth Donaire Pasquel	Unidos por la República		hostigamiento político contra h & m def d	sí (faltas disciplinarias)
3935/2018-CR	2016-2021 (2020)	Ley que incentiva y promueve la participación política de la mujer y sanciona el acoso político	27.02.19	Juan Carlos Gonzales Ardiles	Fuerza popular		acoso político def f	no
3903/2018-CR	2016-2021 (2020)	Ley para prevenir y sancionar el acoso político contra las mujeres por constituir una barrera para su participación política igualitaria	02.12.19	Indira Isabel Huilca Flores	Nuevo Perú	sí	acoso político contra las mujeres def a	sí (faltas disciplinarias)
3131/2017-CR	2016-2021 (2020)	Ley contra la violencia política hacia las mujeres	23.07.18	Alejandra Aramayo Gaona	Fuerza popular, Mesa de Mujeres Parlamentarias		violencia politica hacia las mujeres def d	no

					Peruanas			
673/2016-CR	2016-2021 (2020)	Ley para prevenir, sancionar y erradicar el acoso político contra las mujeres	11.23.16	Indira Isabel Huilca Flores	Frente Amplio por Justicia, Vida y Libertad	sí	acoso político contra las mujeres def b	sí (faltas disciplinarias)
4212/2014-CR	2011-2016	Ley que define y sanciona el acoso político	04.03.15	Natalie Condori Jahuirra	Dignidad y Democracia		acoso político def c	sí (faltas penales)
1903/2012-CR	2011-2016	Ley contra el acoso político de las mujeres	01.03.13	Veronika Fanny Mendoza Frisch	Acción Popular-Frente Amplio	Sí	acoso político hacia las mujeres def similar a b	sí (faltas penales)

III. Methodology

Research Design

This case study assesses how Violence Against Women in Politics (VAWIP) is perceived by national political elites in Peru. The empirical focus is placed on members of the 2016–2019 National Congress, capturing elite perceptions prior to the adoption of Peru’s specific law on the matter in 2021. The primary objective is to explore gender dynamics in the ways political elites detect, evaluate, and rationalise manifestations of VAWIP. To achieve this, the study adopts a descriptive mixed-methods research design that combines quantitative data on the perceived frequency of predetermined violent acts with qualitative insights derived from personal testimonies. This approach enables a comparative analysis across two distinct contexts: the internal legislative arena of the National Congress and the broader electoral campaign arena. The legislature of the 2020–2021 special period was intentionally excluded from the scope of this article, as it was elected under exceptional circumstances following the constitutional dissolution of Congress in September 2019 and served only as a transitional body until the 2021 general elections.

Data collection and sample characteristics

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted between May and October 2020. Due to the strict COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns enforced in Peru during that period, all interviews were carried out remotely via telephone or encrypted online video platforms. These interviews were a component of a broader research project examining women's political representation in Peru (Slaviero 2025). Despite the logistical complexities of recruiting high-level political elites under lockdown conditions, 29 former legislators participated in the study, representing 22.3% of the total 130-member chamber. Recruitment followed a two-stage purposive strategy. During the first stage, formal invitation letters were transmitted via email to all 130 former members of the 2016–2019 legislature. In a subsequent stage, a secondary snowball sampling mechanism was deployed to maximize participation, counting on initial respondents to establish contact with peers. The final participating sample comprised 14 women and 15 men. As displayed in detail in Table 1, the demographic profiles regarding age and educational attainment were closely matched between both groups; the average age was 50 years for female respondents and 55 years for male respondents, with a significant majority holding postgraduate degrees. The sample exhibits balanced geographic distribution between representatives from the capital district and

those from regional provinces, alongside diverse ethnic backgrounds. Politically, the sample is distributed across six major political parties and spans eight mayor parliamentary groupings active between 2016 and 2019¹¹. While most respondents lacked prior national legislative experience, a significant majority expressed intent to pursue their political careers further. Notably, within the cohort aspiring to higher political offices in the future, men were disproportionately represented.

Table 1.
Sample descriptive statistics

Participants		Women (14)	Men (15)	Tot (29)
Age	30-39	2	1	3
	40-49	5	5	10
	50-59	5	3	8
	60-79	2	6	8
Number of children	0	1	4	5
	1	3	0	3
	2-3	8	8	16
	4-6	2	3	5
Level of education	Secondary/ Technical	1	0	1
	Bachelor	2	3	5
	Postgraduate	11	12	23
Ethnic group	"indigena"	2	3	5
	"mestizo"	8	10	18
	"afroperuano"	0	0	0
	"blanco"	1	1	2
	don't know /no answer	1	3	4
Electoral Circumscription	Capital	6	7	13
	Regions	8	8	16
Personal ideological	Left	4	8	12
Positioning	Centre	5	1	6
	Right	5	6	11
Party ideological positioning	Left	3	7	10
	Centre	2	1	3
	Right	9	7	16

¹¹ The eight parliamentary groupings included in the sample are: Fuerza Popular; Contigo; Liberal; Frente Amplio; Nuevo Perú; Acción Popular; Alianza para el Progreso; Celula Aprista; Alianza Popular; Independientes/No agrupados.

Legislative terms	1	8	8	16
	2	2	2	4
	3-6	4	5	9
Interest in continuing in politics	Yes	10	13	23
	No	4	2	6
Interest in higher political position	Yes	7	11	18
	No	7	4	11

Quantitative and qualitative analysis

To address the primary research question regarding potential gender gaps in the detection and perception of VAWIP, quantitative data were gathered through structured, close-ended questions. Respondents evaluated the frequency with which women face discrimination and violence specifically *for being women* across two distinct scenarios: while contesting general elections as candidates, and while serving as elected officials within the National Congress. Using a 5-point Likert frequency scale (ranging from *never* to *very often*), this quantitative component evaluated participants' detection of nine pre-identified manifestations of violence. These categories were adapted from the 2012 landmark study on elected female authorities promoted by the National Network of Women Authorities (RENAMA) and conducted by the Flora Tristán Centre (Quintanilla Zapata 2012). These same categories align with frameworks utilized in national candidate surveys conducted by the National Jury of Elections (JNE)¹². The nine pre-identified situations encompass different dimensions, with particular attention paid for semiotic violence. This last one was operationalised through six behavioral items, since it is recognised as the most invisible and normalised dimension (Krook 2022).

1. Defamation regarding personal wealth, intellect, or sexuality (including sexual objectification and intellectual disqualification);
2. Deliberate scheduling of institutional meetings at times and locations that obstruct equal participation;
3. Unfounded allegations of administrative misconduct or criminal offenses;
4. Interference with their functions and/or official duties;
5. Deliberate pressure or inducement of administrative errors, often exacerbated by a lack of institutional staff support;
6. Systematic obstruction of policy proposals and/or legislative initiatives;
7. Psychological violence, including verbal abuse and targeted threats;

¹² With reference to the survey instrument that was applied in the 2014 National Survey to women candidates, conducted by the JNE during the 2104 Regional and Municipal Elections.

- 8. Physical violence; and
- 9. Sexual violence, including sexual harassment and assaults.

The utilization of closed-ended questions facilitated a structured comparison of perceived recurrence across both the electoral and legislative settings, as well as between male and female respondents. Because the scope of this study does not aim to produce exhaustive, generalisable population claims, random sampling and inferential modeling were excluded. Instead, gender cross-tabulation was used to map out descriptive divergences between male and female elite perspectives. While this design does not seek to establish external statistical replicability, the sample size remains robust enough to assess the internal validity of the relationship between respondent gender and elite perceptions of violence (Mohr 1999). Accordingly, association non-parametric testing was performed to verify the strength of the statistical relationship between the respondent's gender and their detection thresholds across the nine predetermined variables.

The second phase of the analysis relied on qualitative material elicited through open-ended questions, which prompted all 29 participants to expand on their understanding of political harassment, drawing from their personal insights, institutional memories, and lived experiences. All interviews were recorded with the participants' consent, fully transcribed, and subjected to inductive thematic analysis. This qualitative framework allowed for nuanced differences within gender groups to emerge, deepening the study's insight into the underlying values, structural barriers, and nuanced forms of gender-based hostility that female elected authorities encounter. This final stage serves to illuminate the overarching political culture and institutional mindsets engrained in the national legislative.

IV. Results

Contextual frequency analysis and gender cross-tabulation

At an aggregated level, the quantitative analysis aptly enables us to distinguish/examine elite detection thresholds in relation to how VAWIP operates across distinct political settings, as displayed in Table 2. These initial patterns suggest that the electoral campaigns are perceived as the primary arena for this type of violence. This observation aligns with the dominant perspective of existing studies on VAWIP in Peru, where campaign trail is the privileged scenario.

VAWIP Manifestation Variables	Perceptions on political violence against women									
	Electoral scenario					Legislative scenario				
	Never	Rarely	Usual.	Often	Very	Never	Rarely	Usual.	Often	Very

				often				often
1. Defamation	4 2	7	8	8	5 6	7	5	6
2. Obstructive scheduling	9 8	6	4	2	12 6	7	3	1
3. Unfounded allegations	9 7	3	7	3	10 6	5	5	3
4. Interference	9 5	8	6	1	9 7	4	6	3
5. Inducement of errors	17 2	6	4	0	14 9	3	2	1
6. Initiative obstruction	6 7	9	6	1	10 4	6	6	3
7. Psychological violence	5 4	6	10	4	6 6	3	8	6
8. Physical violence	10 3	11	5	0	12 5	6	5	1
9. Sexual violence	11 5	7	6	0	14 4	4	6	1

Notes: N respondents: 29. Cells represent absolute counts.

However, disaggregating these frequency ratings by the respondents' gender reveals a more complex and fractured political scenario. Table 3 and 4 map out divergent perceptual patterns using the format of/ in the form of descriptive cross-tabulations. When analysing the responses of female representatives, a wide consensus emerges regarding the pervasive nature of VAWIP. Despite being from different political groupings, the vast majority of women identified a moderate to high frequency (*usually, often or very often*) across nearly all nine pre-identified manifestations of mistreatment, both as candidates and as elected authorities. Crucially, their observations indicated that several categories were experienced more acutely in the incumbency period than in the candidacy phase, signaling that formal entry into public office does not necessarily ease hostility against politically active women. When shifting the focus to men's perception of the violence encountered by their female colleagues, the same nine categories were overwhelmingly reframed as occasional instances, or argued to be entirely non-existent. This minimization becomes particularly explicit regarding the in-Congress scenario.

Tables 3 and 4.

	Perceptions on political violence against women as candidates									
VAWIP Manifestation Variables	Never		Rarely		Usually		Often		Very Often	
	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M
1. Defamation	2	2	0	2	2	5	5	3	5	3
2. Obstructive scheduling	4	5	1	7	4	2	3	1	2	0
3. Unfounded allegations	3	6	1	6	2	1	5	2	3	0
4. Interference	3	6	2	3	3	5	5	1	1	0
5. Inducement of errors	6	11	1	1	4	2	3	1	0	0
6. Initiative obstruction	2	4	2	5	4	5	5	1	1	0
7. Psychological violence	1	4	2	2	1	5	6	4	4	0
8. Physical violence	3	7	2	1	4	7	5	0	0	0
9. Sexual violence	4	7	3	2	2	5	5	1	0	0

Perceptions on political violence against women as Congress members

VAWIP Manifestation Variables	Never		Rarely		Usually		Often		Very Often	
	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M
1. Defamation	1	4	2	4	2	5	3	2	6	0
2. Obstructive scheduling	6	6	1	5	3	4	3	0	1	0
3. Unfounded allegations	2	8	1	5	4	1	4	1	3	0
4. Interference	2	7	2	5	1	3	6	0	3	0
5. Inducement of errors	3	11	6	3	3	0	1	1	1	0
6. Initiative obstruction	3	7	1	3	4	2	3	3	3	0
7. Psychological violence	1	5	2	4	1	2	4	4	6	0
8. Physical violence	4	8	1	4	4	2	4	1	1	0
9. Sexual violence	6	8	1	3	2	2	4	2	1	0

Notes: W = Women (n = 14); M = Men (n = 15). Cells represent absolute counts.

A salient descriptive gender gap is visible even when examining the two most frequently detected expressions of mistreatment against women: gender-based defamation of a financial, intellectual or sexual nature (Variable 1) and psychological violence involving verbal abuse and threats (Variable 7). Both female and male elites shared this observation, yet their perceptual thresholds remain far apart. Specifically, 10 female interviewees out of 14 (71%) reported that campaign-based defamation occurs with high or very high recurrence (*often* or *very often*), and the same trend manifested for psychological violence, both in the candidate phase and the incumbent period. Conversely, this high-frequency assessment is shared by only 6 out of 15 (40%) male respondents for defamation against female candidates, and only 4 out of 15 (27%) for psychological harm both during campaigns and public office. This cross-tabulated gap descriptively illustrates that even when political elites agree on the way dominant threats manifest, their perception thresholds diverge along gendered lines.

Mann-Whitney U Test: Gender gaps in VAWIP detection

To assess whether this gender gap constitutes a systematic statistical divide in the way national political elites perceive and detect manifestations of VAWIP across both electoral campaigns and legislative tenures, an Exact Mann-Whitney U test was performed across the nine pre-identified categories of the study. Considering the constraints of the elite sample (N=29) and the ordinal nature of our 5-point Likert frequency scales, this non-parametric approach allows us to calculate the precise probability distribution of two distinct rankings.

When looking at the campaign trail, the empirical results reveal a relevant, directionally uniform divide between female and male elites' perceptions of VAWIP. As displayed in Table 4, across all nine evaluated manifestations of violence against women candidates, female former legislators consistently reported higher frequency scores than their male counterparts, as evidenced by their elevated mean ranks across the board.

Table 4.

VAWIP Manifestation Variable	Mean Rank (Women, n=14)	Mean Rank (Men, n=15)	Mann-Whitney U	Exact p-value (2-tailed)	Significance
1. Defamation	17.14	13.00	135.0	.2012	n.s.
2. Obstructive scheduling of meetings	18.19	12.40	144.0	.0932	p<.10
3. Unfounded allegations	19.19	11.47	158.0	.0202	* (p<.05)
4. Interference with functions	18.33	12.27	146.0	.0769	p<.10
5. Inducement of administrative errors	17.50	13.07	140.0	.1337	n.s.
6. Systematic obstruction of own initiatives	18.25	12.37	150.5	.0511	Borderline p≈.05
7. Psychological violence	19.22	11.43	158.5	.0202	* (p<.05)
8. Physical violence	18.36	12.23	146.5	.0769	p<.10
9. Sexual violence and harassment	17.04	13.10	133.5	.2340	n.s.

Notes: p<.10; * p<.05; n.s. = non-significant

The data indicate significant gender gaps in the detection of two manifestations of VAWIP. Female respondents are significantly more likely to detect attacks related to unfounded criminal or administrative allegations (Variable 3; p=.0202). An identical statistical behaviour is observed regarding psychological violence and threats (Variable 8; p=.0202). Furthermore, strong borderline-significant trends manifest in relation to systemic obstruction of women’s own initiatives and proposals during campaigns, whose value sits directly on the threshold of traditional significance (Variable 6; p=.0511). This highlights that women identify this gatekeeping far more acutely than their male colleagues. Similarly, marginal trends indicating emerging gender gaps are observed in the strategic scheduling of meetings that undermines female access and participation (Variable 2; p=.0932), interference with their political functions as candidates (Variable 4; p= .0769), and physical violence encountered on the campaign trail (Variable 8; p=.0769). Conversely, categories like defamation (Variable 1; p=.2012) and sexual violence and harassment (Variable 9; p=.2340) during electoral campaigns did not register statistically significant differences in mean ranks. This does not imply the absence of the phenomenon; rather it reflects some shared elite awareness of its generalized baseline of occurrence, despite deeply divergent interpretations (of its political relevance?) that will be illuminated in the subsequent qualitative analysis.

When shifting the analytical focus from the electoral scenario to the national legislative arena, once elected officers are serving within the National Congress, the perceptual gender gap transitions from an isolated trend into a systemic and consistent divergence. In fact, the Exact Mann-Whitney U test run on the legislative dataset demonstrates a dramatic amplification of the gendered detection threshold. As displayed in Table 5, while the electoral arena exhibited significance across only two categories, in the congressional scenario six out of the nine

variables registered robust statistical significance ($p < .05$). This indicates a profound normalization among male political elites of the gendered hostility that surrounds their female colleagues.

Table 5.

VAWIP Manifestation Variable	Mean Rank (Women, n=14)	Mean Rank (Men, n=15)	Mann-Whit ney U	Exact p-value (2-tailed)	Significance
1. Defamation	19.43	11.27	167.0	.0059	** ($p<.01$)
2. Obstructive scheduling of meetings	16.46	14.03	125.5	.4005	n.s.
3. Unfounded allegations	20.04	10.30	175.5	.0016	** ($p<.01$)
4. Interference with official duties	20.36	10.37	174.5	.0019	** ($p<.01$)
5. Inducement of administrative errors	19.14	11.13	163.0	.0150	* ($p<.05$)
6. Systematic obstruction of legislative initiatives	18.11	12.10	148.5	.0630	$p<.10$
7. Psychological violence	19.54	11.17	168.5	.0051	** ($p<.01$)
8. Physical violence	18.29	12.33	151.0	.0459	* ($p<.05$)
9. Sexual violence and harassment	17.08	13.43	128.5	.3314	n.s.

The most severe divergence occurs regarding unfounded administrative and criminal allegations (Variable 3; $p=.0016$), and interference with official duties (Variable 4; $p=.0019$), both of which are identified by women as a heavily pervasive threat during their time in office. Statistically, this gender gap reaches peak significance/intensity also in the detection of psychological violence (Variable 7; $p=.0051$), and of defamation of a financial, intellectual or sexual nature (Variable 1; $p=.0059$). This stands in sharp contrast with the electoral arena that did not display a highly significant perceptual cleavage on this last category. Finally, significant gender gaps emerge in the perception of ways to weaponise bureaucratic processes, such as when deliberately inducing female authorities to commit administrative errors through staff manipulation or calculated misinformation (Variable 5; $p=.0150$), and also in relation to physical violence while in office (Variable 8; $p=.0459$).

In sum, the multi-layered structure of the quantitative analysis allows for a deep At an aggregate baseline, the contextual frequency analysis suggests that the campaign trail is widely perceived as the primary arena for VAWIP. However, where these data are disaggregated, the gender cross-tabulation exposes a profound interpretive divergence: while male political elites overwhelmingly reframed pre-identified mistreatments as isolated episodes, or contend that they are not occurring at all, women’s assessments indicated that several categories were actually experienced more acutely during their legislative tenure than on the campaign trail. Finally, the Exact Mann-Whitney U test proves that this perceptual

gender gap does not merely register descriptive salience, but it also achieves robust statistical significance across six out the nine examined expressions of violence.

Qualitative analysis

While the quantitative findings establish the structural distribution and statistical significance of perceptual gender gaps around VAWIP, the qualitative data allow for a deeper immersion into how Peruvian political elites actively make sense of the phenomenon, not just considering women's potential victim perspective, but also including men's witnessing perspective. Moving beyond the rigidity of the nine pre-identified categories, this inductive phase captures specific vocabularies and imagery that political elites draw upon and deploy to portray this violence, and in doing that, the analysis maps relevant discursive divides and conflicting positionings that operate within both gender cohorts.

Among female legislators, three different interpretative frames are prioritised:

- *Systemic pervasiveness of VAWIP*: a frame capturing deep concern over the way VAWIP is spread across the political arena and its impact on women's meaningful participation in decision-making;
- *Ideological double standards in VAWIP*: a standpoint prioritizing how women from the Fuerza Popular party are targeted in a distinct manner, while illuminating the broad impact of VAWIP over every female political involvement;
- *Normalization of political aggression*: a position that reframes hostility against women as an inherent feature of a gender-neutral aggressive political environment where men and women are affected equally.

Conversely, the testimonies of male representatives split into two primary frames:

- *Conscious witnessing*: A frame emphasizing.. from a male point of view...
- *Reactionary gatekeeping*: a standpoint where male elites minimise ...

1) Women: Concern with VAWIP as a pervasive phenomenon that affect women's participation

The most prevalent interpretative frame among female legislators positions PVAW not as a series of isolated attacks, but as a systemic violation of women's political rights, echoing the pervasive interconnectedness/continuum of infringements identified within the framework that conceptualizes it as a subset of VAW /violence as a violation of *personal integrity* aiming

at a “group-based political exclusion” (Krook 2020, 89). Moreover, in contrast with what emerges from the *electoral integrity* framework, the different levels of PVAW, including the semiotic dimension, are positioned as an active disruption of democratic decision-making, as they are described as compromising their ability to fulfil their mandate. Spanning the entire ideological spectrum and bridging the capital-regional geographic divide, this standpoint can be illustrated with two separate narrative tracks. The first one focuses on loud repertoires of mistreatments that construct a spectacularization of women’s supposed ill-fitness as leaders. The second one exposes obstructive mechanisms that restrain women’s electoral responsiveness/accountability in concealed ways.

The first group of narratives captures a rowdy level of hostility designed to choreograph and put on display the “oddity” of a woman occupying a position of authority and power. In line with/in dialogue with Krook’s conceptualization of semiotic violence as *rendering incompetent*, which “emphasizes role incongruity between being a woman and being a leader” (Krook 2022, 372), these mechanisms rely on forcing a **bodily-marked** hyper-visibility upon women, as lacking or ill-fitted decision-makers.

During our interviews, this spectacle of notorious defectiveness materialised in relation to public shaming, degrading and lampooning, while the key role of the media and social networks as amplifiers was heavily stressed (CW4, AP, left; CW5, UpR, right; CW6, AP, left; CW8, NP, left; CW12, FP, right). Elaborating on that, CW6 stated: “*In Lima, there is a great deal of psychological violence, especially through social media. (...) also political cartoons [caricaturas]. Women who enter politics end up caricaturised in some way.*”

These cyber abuse and semiotic distortion, deployed for humiliating, intimidating and forcing women out of politics,

were described as targeting women candidates as well as women occupying prestigious positions of authority,

“*Let me give you a concrete example, something very common with [male] presidents. When they are upset with their female vice president, on July 28th [Independence day] they just walk right past her (...) they shake everyone’s hand but not their vice president’s. (...) Then it becomes the headline of the day, and they know that this affects you a lot.*”, explained CW6, (AP, left). As this account reveals, these expressions of PVAW can be deployed not only to force women out of politics, as the *personal integrity* framework highlights, but also as discipline mechanisms for straight-jacketing women’s dealignment.

Respondents also provided insights for the normalization of this mistreatment, framing it as the expected “cost of politics” : “(...) *on top of that, they justify it by telling you: ‘You chose to enter politics, so your life must be transparent.’ (..) And by the time you disprove these slanders, five years can easily pass in a judicial process. (..)*” (CW6, AP, left).

Congresswomen related these forms of PVAW with a pervasive *atmosphere* of hyperscrutiny that resonates with the bodily-marked super-surveillance dynamics unfolded in Puwar’s (2004) work. As a representative phrased it, “*The most rigorous scrutiny is directed toward the woman (campaigning). Firstly: who is she? Does she have a profession or not? Does she speak well or not? Then: is she goodlooking or not? Does she dress nicely or poorly—comments that are not made about a man.*” (CW2, FP, right). Another legislator explained that in Congress “(...) *gentlemen cross the line with their remarks. That’s workplace harassment, both ‘positive’ - in quotation marks, because for them it’s positive, but for us it isn’t - and negative.*” (CW4, AP, left). As we can see, the primary target is women’s bodies, as their appearance can be weaponized or sexualized. Either way, it would not be an overstatement to contend that women are downgraded from political *subjects* and legitimate partners in decision-making and turned to *objects* of men’s evaluation or desires. In contrast, masculine superiority as the true legitimate figure for leadership remains both implied and reinforced.

The same dynamic of body-marked supersurveillance and public shaming/caricaturing women’s defectiveness as leaders is forced upon women’s real or imagined sexual-affective interactions and their role within the family. CW2 (FP, right) juxtaposed the intense scrutiny faced by women candidates against the discursive shields that make men’s private life irrelevant: “*In the case of a male candidate, it doesn’t matter if he has multiple romantic relationships; he is not judged. (...) in the case of a woman who may have had, perhaps, a failed marriage or relationship, or if she is single and marries someone who had separated (...) She is labeled as a caza-maridos [husband-hunter] or targeted with other slurs. (...) she’s viewed as an opportunist (..)*”. This resonates with the “slut-shaming” tropes identified by Krook, as semiotic devices for rendering women politically incompetent. With this hostile bodily-marked exposure, politically engaged women become easy targets as morally deviants. During their legislative tenure, “*Criticism has nothing to do with women’s official duties; the focus is on their private lives*”, reported CW1 (PPK, right).

Women's hyper-visibility as ill-fitting leaders is also fostered through the devaluation of their mental faculties and intellectual credibility. As one representative recalled, *"there is this constant stigmatization that we are fools [brutas] (...) I've heard this in almost all commission meetings: 'no, it's just that she's a woman, she doesn't understand'. And I tell them, 'What does being a woman have to do with it?'"* (CW9, FP, right). Testimonies underscored that attacks on psychological stability are strategically deployed to dismiss women's competence, even when they occupy leveraged institutional positions. Referring to a high-profile colleague from a major opposing party (Fuerza Popular) who served as the chair of the Constitution Committee, one legislator reported: *"They constantly dismissed her as crazy [le sacaban de loca] (...) She was attacked every single day. I was in a dispute with her because she refused to discuss my reform in the committee, but that was no way to treat someone. It was horrible. It affected me deeply (...)"* (CW4, AP, left).

These accounts reveal that mechanisms of hypervisible defectiveness deployed against women do not only harm targeted individuals, but also have an impact on the witnessing congresswomen. While this violence compromises the institutional environment, it also creates an opening for gender solidarity to arise beyond party lines. Another left-wing legislator recalled an instance in which she had witnessed a female party opponent from Fuerza Popular being verbally attacked by [being affected by] a public official during a parliamentary session: *"Neither she nor any of her female party colleagues could react, but I did. Because for me, a threat to one woman is a threat to us all [si tocan a una, nos tocan a todas]. (...) I stepped in because it came from my ovaries [me nace de los ovarios] (...) My reaction had nothing to do with her political party affiliation. I felt attacked as a woman, and I reacted. (...)".* (CW7, FA, left). Another elected authority described instances of cross-party solidarity in response to harassment on social networks and traditional media: *"I signed letters supporting them, even though they belonged to different parties (...)"* (CW6, AP, left), she explained.

This hostile over-exposure of women based on their supposed bodily-marked defectiveness in leadership deepens when these women deviate from the "somatic norm" of power (Puwar 2004) not just on account of their gender, but also due to the racist colonial heritage national economic structures and political institutions are built upon (SEGATO?). Testimonies explained that these elected authorities are routinely singled out as 'provincial' women [provincianas] (CW2; CW6; CW7), a term that does not simply refer to a locus of origins, but is also loaded with/ also carries the weight of an unabashed contempt directed toward corporalities and geographies OTHER THAN the metropolitan-centralist logic (that dictates

capital politics?) (SEGATO; CUSICANQUI..). This geographical hierarchy was explicitly articulated by one left-wing representative:

“(..) discrimination is not just about our status as women, but also about our geographic origin [procedencia]. A woman from Lima who has built up a certain leadership—and therefore enjoys greater visibility—receives very different treatment than someone from the interior of the country. Even more so if she comes from the highlands [sierra] or the Amazonian rainforest [selva]. That is where gender discrimination intersects with the racial discrimination that so often arises in our country based on whether one comes from the highlands, the coast, or the provinces. Being 'provincial' [lo provinciano] carries a heavy weight in this country's politics.” (CW7, FA, left).

and they gave examples of the way these tropes signal the entrenched contempt

Testimonies highlight peripheral women are notably ridiculed and humiliated for their appearance, especially the way they dress, speak, style their hair and go without makeup. As one conservative representative reflected, this bodily scrutiny reflects deep-seated class and racial hierarchies: *“And I believe this originates from a type of social discrimination, because if they (..) descended from distinguished people, no one would care if they went barefoot or wore shoes. But since they do not have such distinguished ties, they are subjected to the highest scrutiny.” (CW2, FP, right).* This construction on hyper-visible bodily-marked defectiveness extends beyond physical appearance to tarnish women's legislative performance, especially when peripheral legislators foster proposals that relate to peripheral economies and ways of living.

Remarkably, during the interviews? peripheral representatives from opposing ideologies independently pointed out to the exact same legislative example - the recognition of informal herbal tea vendors (*emolienteros*) and regional agricultural tubers - to expose how metropolitan elites make use of public shaming for putting on display peripheral bodies' constructed defectiveness as leaders and produce a political erasure of non-metropolitan issues.

“Their declaratory bills [proyectos declarativos] sometimes trigger mockery (..) such as, for example, the bill for traditional herbal tea vendors [emolienteros]. To many, it might seem like a joke, but those in the emolientero sector feel represented because they are not being forgotten (..).”, explained CW2 (FP, right).

“They ridicule women sometimes; they say, ‘Oh, look, fulanita [so-and-so] is presenting this proposal’. The (bill for the) Day of the Emolientero [traditional herbal tea vendor], for example. They ask ‘What is the point of that?’ But there are people for whom it matters, for whom it is important to be made visible in a society. For the critics, it isn’t important, but for the citizens, it truly is. It shows a total lack of understanding, a disconnection from common sense. They mockingly say, ‘Sure, but bills about potatoes and olluco [indigenous highland tuber]?’ But people make a living from that; they need to know their potatoes and their olluco are valued (..) It boosts their self-esteem, their drive to start a business. That is important.” (CW6, AP, left).

A second group of narratives (especially vocal left-wing women)

Another salient level that becomes exposed when women legislators make sense of VAWIP as jeopardizing women’s political representation in a pervasive manner unfolds concealed obstructive mechanisms to politically erase women (POLITICIDADfemenina*RitaSegato) and hollow out their political responsiveness. As opposed to violence that insists on evoking defectiveness and putting light on/amplifying it, these violent mechanisms consist in disguised but active blockades that look for minimising the positive impacts of women’s political performance / minimising their potential undisciplined political impact./ stop women from being politically impactful, especially in an undisciplined/autonomous way.

They range from subtle obstructions to ghettoisation of women’s interests and economic impediments. ...to physical violence.

Some legislators highlighted specific impediments activated during electoral campaigns, such as property destruction. *“I saw that wherever my advertisements were placed, they would be removed”*, CW4 (AP, left) noted. Another legislator emphasized the use of replacement to hollow out gender electoral instruments and *“change your position on the electoral ballot”* (CW1, PPK, right).

Another major concern was about the economic neutralization of women's impactfulness. “(..) *they do not give you the chance to work actively; they give you a tiny budget, they deny you resources. You have to start from scratch without the slightest resource, so you can barely make any progress. They deny you the tools that they do have - the men, the gentlemen.*” (CW6, AP, left)

Testimonies also showed how the obstruction of women's legislative initiatives is part of a process of hollowing out women's electoral responsiveness. A left-wing legislator commented on the way she was confronted and silenced when she worked on an economic proposal that would reform the Constitution. “*So, I presented a reform to modify precisely the entire economic chapter (of the Constitution), and this led to a confrontation for me as a woman and as a politician. I suffered political violence because they called me a ‘roja’ [communist] - you know I am centre-left and our party platform is centre-left - and upon presenting this initiative, I was heavily questioned*” (CW4, AP, left).

Despite being in line/connected with her party ideological framework and “*what people were asking for in the moment, we were (estabamos leyendo el sentir de la población)*”, her legislative performance found an active blockade within her own party: “*The party spokesperson [vocero] himself sidelined me; I had no support because they claimed that (...) I was too far left, which isn't true. (..) I wasn't backed up (by my own party) (..) and it is ironic, because the person who attacked me so much is now a congressman, and from my own party.*” (CW4, AP, left)

This perspective helps us illuminate instances of lack of support from women's own parties, even if their initiatives are in line with the party ideological framework; however, their proposals might be valued and put forward later, once the politician is no longer an elected authority. “*Only now the party is valuing that proposal (...) (at that time) they did want to make no change in the Constitutional economic chapter but now, in our current circumstances, what they want precisely is a change of the constitution (..) So it's a shame that it was not valued at the time (..)*” (CW4, AP, left)

Political paralyzation and economic obstruction

Impact-neutralization mechanisms can also be related to processes of ghettoisation of women's interests. “*There were only ten of us (in our caucus) and we allocated the debate among the ten of us.. And of course, whenever it came to gender issues or women's issues, there I was, working on them. There's still this conception that gender issues belong solely to women. I do not know when we will make some progress on that.*” (CW7, FA, left).

((interference in their functions, referring especially to the boycott of legislative proposals, to prevent bills from being put to a vote in the committee; to “be ordered” to vote in a certain way; interference: dispute over space in Congress for setting out particular public events?

A nivel de provincia, de distrito, a nivel de cargos de regidoras (...) Un caso que yo ví, porque le habían ordenado que votara en una determinada manera. Allí sí lo he visto, y no he tenido mayores reportes de esos casos. (CW6, AP, left)

))

Mechanisms to obstruct and restrain autonomous initiatives were greatly emphasized in relation to legislative oversight/ audit responsibility, both at the national and the local levels (CW2, CW4, CW12). These narratives illuminate women’s role in the frontline against multi-level corruption, their effort to defend their territory from predatory economic activities, and the cost of it.

Some testimonies allow us to capture that in this case the vectors of VAWIP expand beyond state actors and political adversaries, to encompass powerful corporate interest groups. Talking about her being the president of a special anti-corruption commission involved in auditing important businesses in the tourist sector, especially in Cusco, one legislator explained: *“I had to face off against many people, powerful interest groups. (..) I was a victim of... they almost killed me. (..) These businessmen didn’t want this investigated. (...) Those were moments I truly felt I had no strength left. I think only thanks to God I was able to stand up against that giant monster that is corruption, and finally conclude that investigation.”* (CW4, AP, left). The same heavy distress we can observed in *“Me han pasado muchas cosas, y hasta el día de hoy me cuesta, porque tuve amenazas. He chocado con poderes”* (CW12, FP, right) commented by another representative, while reflecting on the audit leadership as president of the Special Commission for the investigation of the “14 zonas registrales”. These testimonies allow us to have a flash of how sophisticated and multifaceted the net of impact-neutralization and obstruction mechanisms can be when laid out. It can comprise legal intimidation, attempts of bribery, threats and extreme physical violence: *“(..) they kept sending me countless notary demand letters [cartas notariales] claiming that this was not part of my official duties; they harassed me through lawyers (...) They made indecent proposals [bribery attempts], but we always stood firm in our fight against corruption(...).”*

(..) during a formal presentation [sustentación] of the investigation where I went with two other congressmen (...) they [the corporations] had sent people to attack us. So, when I found

out, I had to bring in extra police reinforcement to protect the safety of the congressmen and my own. But I pushed through until the end; I achieved it, even though I suffered that physical attack from a person who (assaulted me, but well... I took it to a judicial process, and in court, they ordered him to pay a fine of only 400 soles [approx. \$110 USD]. The guy) almost strangled me (, and he only got, I think, 40 days of community service.)"

As we can observe, this extreme violent opposition both affects women's personal integrity and political rights, in its attempts to sullenly hollow out their electoral responsiveness: "*That was my job, and one of my official duties (..) it was also what I promised during my campaign: precisely to investigation these concessions that had been granted for more than 20 years and did not benefit (..)*" the people of her constituency.

Undermining responsiveness - racism- intersectionality:

"(..) two Congress-women from Cusco started speaking in their first language - quecha, and they were almost immediately silenced; they were told that they were able to speak in Spanish, so they should speak in Spanish. No one realised they were talking to their own communities." (CW6, own translation)¹³.

2) Women: VAWIP affecting women from Fuerza Popular Party in a distinctive way, based on ideological double standards

In the context of political polarization - fuerza popular

In this frame, narratives address VAWIP as targeting women active in politics for being women; however, they stress that party affiliation/association is a central variable. One representative explained: "*La política en general en Latinoamérica es muy discriminatoria con respecto a las mujeres. No se nos cuestiona por nuestras capacidades, sino por el simple hecho de ser mujeres. Se nos estigmatiza y en el caso del partido político que me invitó y que yo representé en el congreso, con más razón.*" (CW9, FP, right). Despite vehemently reporting the pervasiveness of violence affecting all women in the political arena, the attention is drawn to their affiliation or association to a specific political party, Fuerza Popular, especially when it comes to aggressive media coverage. Another legislator, while arguing that all women in politics are hyper-scrutinized and heavily criticized, pointed out it exacerbates when/if: "*(..) si eres del partido Fuerza Popular, allí sí estás fregada. (...) Porque te caricaturizan. Hay en un diario, la República, un caricaturista Carlín que por ejemplo nos saca de la peor forma. Yo creo que eso es ridiculizar, eso también una violencia hacia la mujer (..)*" (CW2, FP, right). Making reference to the ten years of the Fujimori government

¹³ original in Appendix I

and the corruption cases related to it, another representative explained in which ways women that are politically engaged with FP, are targeted *“por el simple hecho de pertenecer o representar a este partido político, los delitos que se le imputan, las faltas, los errores incluso de su gobierno son imputados a quien pertenecemos en algún momento a representación”* (CW9).

These testimonies also put emphasis on the way women's reports and complaints against violence are dealt with, depending on party affiliation/association. Comments like *“(.) lamentablemente no ha habido ninguna institución que nos haya defendido, ni el propio parlamento, ni menos el Ministerio de la Mujer. (...) siempre en cuanto sea congresista de Fuerza popular, allí no hay defensa; pero si fueran congresistas de otro partido aliado al gobierno, allí sí inmediatamente salen a censurar a ese medio de comunicación (.)”* (CW2), help illustrate a narrative of double standard and revictimization, that in this case sits in dissonance with previous testimonies around gender solidarity across party lines.

The narratives of this frame are also connected with extremely distressing and traumatic processes that can lead to active decisions to quit/withdraw from political careers. That was the case with a representative who alleged an insufficient political experience, while having worked as a public servant for more than ten years (at that moment): *“Para mi la política ha sido una de las cosas más difíciles de mi vida. (.) es un ámbito muy agreste, muy difícil para una persona que no tiene experiencia, como le dicen los Latinos, que no tiene cuero de chanco. Yo estoy curada. Yo no voy a regresar a hacer política. Ya me desvinculé completamente del partido político que representé, además renuncié antes de acabar el mandato a ese partido político y no tengo nada que ver con ellos, salvo el agradecimiento de haberme llevado (a participar).”*

3) Women: Normalization of politics as an aggressive environment, where women and men are equally affected (Denial of VAWIP)

This frame brings together those narratives which normalize politics as a violent environment where women and men have to be prepared as potential targets - and targeted in the same manner, while at the same time, arguing that members of Fuerza Popular, both men and women, are victims of political hounding / are politically hounded. In this particular study those narratives relate with a specific profile: women politicians from the capital, “mestizas”, members of Fuerza Popular and -in close alignment with the party.

Accordingly, this frame emphasizes/claims for the absence of VAWIP. Here most of the nine pre-conditioned instances of violence are found to be irrelevant, with the exception of those

circumstances where both men and women are affected equally. There is a claim for associating considerable recurrence /relevant instances of violent attack to “*political stature [relevancia política]*” and visibility within the Congress (CW3, FP), or “*political projection [proyección política]*” (CW13, FP). Attacks are gender-neutral.

However, there is extreme emphasis in describing attacks as gender-neutral and associating instead associating them to party affiliation. A representative reported a “*political hounding against Fujimorismo*” (CW14). Another legislator explained: “*No es por ser mujer, aquí depende de qué partido se pertenece. Si es el partido de Fuerza Popular, todos somos corruptos, todos somos contra la mujer, todas nos merecemos que nos insulten, que nos agredan, que nos tilden de lo peor y nadie sale a defendernos. Cuando son de la izquierda, allí todos salen a solidarizarse con ellos.*” (CW13, FP).

The political violence that Fuerza Popular faced is explained as related to the party’s confrontation with the executive, with special emphasis to the legislative oversight - against(?) the executive “*(..) portadas tras portadas negativas de descalificación cuando están haciendo su labor de fiscalización al gobierno por unos hechos de corrupción (...) con mayor saña a Fuerza Popular o a otros congresistas independientes que hacen el control político al gobierno de turno.*” (CW13) **These reports of gender-neutral attacks concentrated on media portrayal and defamation, while dismissing all other forms of violence.**

Testimonies insisted on the double standards when addressing attacks against Congress members, depending on which political grouping the victim is associated: when the defamation targets members of Fuerza Popular, the men and women are equally affected as they “*no tienes credibilidad, no tienes lugar a la defensa, te sentencian anticipadamente, y te caen a través de las redes, del ejecutivo, y de los medios de prensa. Pero si eres de otro partido, sí te creen, o te dicen que es posible que te lo hayan fabricado.*” (CW13, FP).

In contrast with illustrating reports of differentiated gender-neutral political violence against Fuerza Popular, this frame also illuminates how those same reports are accompanied by claims that hostility and aggressions are part of the standard functioning of politics, and women who want to enter this arena should “*ganar su espacio y hacerse respetar. Yo nunca he tenido problema, me he hecho respetar, he plantado mi posición, no me ha disminuido sustentar mi punto de vista frente a una colega mujer, o frente a un varón, indistintamente porque aquí lo que tiene que ganar es el sustento, no el ser mujer o el ser varón.*” (CW13). Another legislator explained that “*Si tú te deja, no te hacen hacer nada; tienes que saberte defender.*” (CW14)

In this frame, narratives stress the salience of having the right personality as a woman to be able to function in politics, considering it an aggressive environment that needs to be faced as it is. *“Yo creo que hay que tener autonomía y personalidad. Si tu no tienes personalidad y autonomía, te pueden decir ‘tu vota así’ o (...). A mi nadie se atrevería (..) porque saben como soy, saben que yo defiendo mi autonomía y tengo capacidad de decisión. (..) A mi raramente (me ha afectado) porque gracias a Dios soy una mujer fuerte (...)”* (CW13).

4) Men: witnessing consciously

In this frame men drew upon their experience as conscious witnesses of VAWIP to point out that it affects women's political involvement as candidates and as elected authorities.

In this frame men view VAWIP as an important factor that affects women's political involvement both as candidates and as elected authorities.

These testimonies are located across the ideological spectrum and they exemplify some men's personal uneasiness with the fact that women still perform in politics on unequal footing

In particular, there are two dimensions of VAWIP that men emphasize in this frame.

The first expressions of VAWIP that stand out in these testimonies can be associated with its semiotic dimension.-- Legislators give examples of systematic mechanisms to silencing and disqualifying women, maninterrupting..

Using their own words, one reflected on the systematic degradation of women's competence, which can be seen recurrently in the electoral scenario, with expressions like “How is she going to enter the debate? Better not to, she'll just start crying!” as well as in the legislative context where “[They say], ‘Oh don't say anything to that woman’, or ‘Don't pay attention to her. She's crazy. Let her say whatever she wants’ (..)” (CM2).

There is some awareness that references of crying or psychological instability are actively used as rhetorical gendered traps to shame and disqualify women in the public space.

Another congressman reported vehemently disqualification/.. can be seen clearly in official meetings “where it was palpable that a female colleague was not being listened to in the same way as a male congressman, despite being a person of great political weight and saying relevant things in the debate. They would interrupt her, they would ignore her (..)” (CM6) In

the case of indigenous Congresswomen, “the discrimination is doubled: they do not listen to her because she is a woman and (..) because she is indigenous.” (CM6) These examples show how the decision-making process can be made impregnable/ hermetic to women’s contribution, actually fostering political erasure with no need for physical removal/displacement. **WOMEN-PROOFING**.

In this frame men are not always articulate and emphatic in their testimonies: some of them may hesitate to recall precise episodes of VAWIP, while they make reference to a party where female colleagues are actively engaged with the elimination of gendered violence. “There may be some form of psychological violence, in the sense of devaluing the contribution that women can make to politics. It may have occurred under certain circumstances. (..) Surely there are certain moments, but the female colleagues who join the party do so precisely to fight this from within (..)” (CM4).

Sexual violence is the other main VAWIP dimension to be highlighted in these testimonies. It can manifest in different ways: “sexual defamation (..) linking them romantically or sexually with people within their professional circle” (CM6); “unwanted touching” (CM2); when certain female candidates are invited [to events],

people are staring at them excessively—things like that, to intimidate them.” (CM15). - semiotic/ sexualization Recalling women’s testimonies

Salient insights on women’s economic barriers are included in this frame. A congressman argued that the enormous gendered pressure placed on women not just for “unpaid domestic work, but also caregiving duties” represent a major structural problem, and this can be observed, for example, when his female colleagues in parliament are expected to take care of a sick parent, because “*she was the only daughter among (..) five siblings*” (CM6). Even when these financial barriers are taken into consideration, in some cases they can be misrecognised as “*self-limitations [autolimitaciones]; for example, a woman who is a mother and does not have much time, does not have her own income, lacks economic independence, and that limits her political activity.*” (CM7)

This way of framing women’s economic subordination/dependency to personal limitations is also encountered by the awareness of the existence of subtle double standards that reinforce the association between women and lack of assets: “*ambition is well-regarded in a male politician, but ambition is censurable in a female politician.*” (CM6).

5) Men: Denying VAWIP - The VAWIP Minimisers

This cluster captures the deflation mechanisms used by men when talking about, and making sense of, situations in which women in politics are attacked for being women. These elements compounded a counter-narrative that aims at reframing the discourse around gender parity and helps us make sense of the gender gap observed in the quantitative analysis.

For justifying what they perceived to be an anecdotal recurrence of these circumstances or not to exist at all, legislators mobilised/deployed articulated standpoints/tropes with little hesitancy. Highly articulated standpoints which are vehemently put forward, in contrast with the occasional hesitancy encountered in the previous frame. Magistramente illustrated by this fragment:

I've never encountered any issue related to or biased because of gender. (...) I campaigned with a girl in 2015, and both of us were having the same rights and the same obligations for whichever activities we were invited to. (...) There has always been a harmonious balance in the development of the day-to-day, independently of gender or sex. (...) And in Congress, it is exactly the same. (...) No, no, no—look, let me explain the landscape to you. (...) On the issue of gender, I think things are balanced; there is no bias either in the media or in the way politics is conducted. (...) (CM5).

Making sense of the patriarchal obstruction to the debate on VAWIP during the years.

One important element used for explaining women-to-men unbalance in politics, in this frame, consists to / appeals to the image of women's fear or little political ambition, while dismissing structural barriers. //// One important element consists in justifying women-to-men unbalance in politics with appeals to women's fear or little political ambition, while completely dismissing structural barriers. One interviewee who was "*in charge of evaluating certain candidates to promote them (..) on behalf of the party*", explained that "*women are capable, they get there (..) but there are not many because of their own fear to participate, to compete (..)*" (CM 10, FP). fearful competitors

Signalling women as responsible for their own marginalization in politics due to their lack of interest or ambition is also emphatically used for constructing a case against gender parity from the left. "*(..) parity sounds nice, but (..) what I have seen in all electoral processes over all these years is that women are being forced to appear on a political list. Because women do not want to (...) That is why I don't believe in parity; I believe in other types of reforms.*" (CM14), claimed a Congressman from Frente Amplio.

This argument can be intertwined with remarks of a gender-blind meritocracy by Congressmen from both right-wing and left-wing parties. One legislator from the right viewed gender electoral mechanisms as something that qualified women themselves didn't want in their respective countries, prior to a certain political climate?; for example, in relation

to Colombia and Germany, he stated that women used to *“come out and say they needed no quota because they felt competent. (...) I don't think Angela Merkel needed some quotas.* (CM12, PPK). (De su parte,/In a related fashion..) Another Congressman (from the left) argued that *“parity means that there will be internal elections (...) but you have to take away the merit from either the [winning] woman or the man just to achieve a 50/50 balance, and I do not agree with this.”*, and there was why he supported *“other types of reforms (...)”* (CM14, Frente Amplio). No primarias in the country

Despite believing that *“gender parity was not the answer”*, he stressed that he and his party colleagues were not contesting the claims for gender parity in the Congress coming from “the women of the most liberal sector of the left”: *“at the very least, we said nothing (...) we were showing solidarity, because they were part of our group; but what I am saying now is what many actually thought. (this same opinion on gender parity was shared by many)”*; on the contrary, he reported that *“Fujimorismo successfully contested the arguments of the women from the liberal left”*. (CM14).

From the left, testimonies reinforce the idea that men have nothing to do with aggressive politics

In this frame, left-wing interviewees conveyed the idea that VAWIP is anecdotal or not occurring at all, by reframing attacks as part of occasional - ideological - disputes that has nothing to do with gender, while completely deflecting the violent matrix of social structures that denies women's entitlement to participate in decision-making.

One legislator shared that *“What I see is that competition between women tends to be harsher than competition from men (...) it occurs very frequently (...) even leading to bitterness and verbal violence in some cases.”* (CM7)

Blockage through aggressive floor debates, attacking them.. *what I have perceived is that women's broader legislative agendas have been obstructed// contested. [by] Fujimorismo (...) who was doing the obstructing, primarily? The other women (...) the women of Fujimorismo against the other female parliamentarians.* (CM14).

In this frame men's testimonies unfold the intractable/irreducible double-bind blame that women carry: women are blameable for not defending women rights' agenda and attacking female advocates, but they are also blameable for defending that agenda and inciting the rage of those who are not.

Blaming women on one side and the other: “I believe that here (..) feminists are the primary enemies of feminists. (..) The only thing they are generating is a negative backlash. There is a performative overreaction [*sobreactuación*] in some instances that eclipses acts that are truly pernicious, harmful, and condemnable. For example, very recently, a female journalist is told: ‘I saw you on television, you are very beautiful,’ and she replies, ‘I am going to report you for harassment.’ Is that harassment? (pausing- *pausa d’effetto*, looking shocked) And why? Because she likely wants a thousand retweets.” (CM12, PPK).

This perceived “*performative overreaction*” of women when it comes to violence is also described as producing plain lies; apparently, no matter how close or dear the female colleague might be, there is an inevitable mistrust pending over her shoulders when she talks about violence. Referring to sexual harassment in the electoral context, one congressman pointed out that “*it doesn’t happen, except those cases in which someone made up things sometimes. It isn’t significant. There was a congresswoman who claimed she had been touched, hugged (....) I knew both of them: she was a very close friend of mine, and so was he (..) and I don’t know why they had a fight/argument?? [se pelearon] and she accused him of unwanted touching. Nobody believed her. I think this is just an anecdote.*” (CM8).

In other testimonies, this “*performative overreaction*” of women lying about aggressions is understood in a patronising way. explainable/pardonable

Asked if he ever perceived women encountering uncomfortable situations in politics in general, he answered: “*No, not within the electoral arena nor within Congress, no. (...) For that matter, nowadays, due to all the institutional flaws in the past, one must be highly prudent with the things one says because anything can trigger some kind of hypersensitivity [susceptibilidad]. And that is normal and understandable, because when a grievance accumulates, it only takes a single drop to make it overflow.*” (CM5)

While some are “almost certain that conditions are nearly balanced” (complete denial), other legislators normalize hostility and violence in politics, describing politics as a degenerated space: *I believe that in general, and not just for women, (..) in Peruvian politics there is a perverse incentive so that only unscrupulous people enter the political arena. I see it as very dirty, (...) lacking ethical values (..) which will cause that just bad people enter politics (..)*” (CM15).

The idea that men have nothing to do with aggressive politics can be intertwined with highly-articulated denial, double-bind culpability on women, or normalization of violence in decision-making. How men handle presumptions of culpability.

VI. Conclusions - to be reframed

In the present case study political violence against women have been explored in relation to both the Peruvian electoral and legislative contexts, based on perceptions of political elites who served in the National Congress between 2016 and 2019, preceding the approval of the Law N° 31155 on “preventing and sanctioning harassment against women in politics”.

Defamation and psychological violence have emerged as the most frequently identified violent situations affecting either women running for office or exercising power, according to women and men’s perceptions. Moreover, personal testimonies have displayed several expressions of gender-based political violence which were not detected in previous local studies, and that depart from the pre-established categories used in the quantitative part of this research case. This is the case, for example, with *disqualification* or *gender-based racial discrimination* affecting women from indigenous communities and regional districts. In this way, the research case has contributed to illustrating the complexity of the phenomenon, while also highlighting the need for further exploring it in ways that allow for expanding on pre-identified categories and reaching more depth.

In addition to that, the study allowed for examining gender gaps in relation to how *political harassment* is perceived. First, in the quantitative part of the inquiry, differences between women and men are evident in terms of the intensity of their perceptions. Most violent situations were considered occasional or not happening by the great majority of male participants, especially when taking into account the in-Congress scenario. In contrast, most women interviewees indicated a considerable frequency with which gender-based violence would occur during electoral campaigns, and interestingly, some of the pre/identified categories would become even more recurrent in the legislative scenario. Gender differences were also confirmed by a correlation analysis which demonstrated the internal significant association between gender and perceptions in relation to several forms of violence. These findings suggest that *political harassment* needs to be examined beyond the electoral context, including the legislative sphere where it is shown that it might occur as frequently, or perhaps even more frequently. This also implies that prevention and attention programs, either currently in place or to be designed, need to consider multiple scenarios.

Secondly, in the qualitative part of the inquiry, men's testimonies draw attention to the widespread lack of awareness around gender-based political violence and its adverse implications for women's engagement in politics on an equal footing. Moreover, looking at women's testimonies, it is shown that *political harassment* is often perceived as "the cost" of doing politics (Krook 2020). These findings underline the extreme need for the implementation of alternative strategies, beside adopting specific legislations, such as strong educational programs to raise awareness around the normalization of *political harassment*, inclusiveness, and gender equality. It is suggested that trainings should be arranged beyond electoral periods, and they should be mandatory for elected officials, both women and men. Such training programs should also be implemented for all influential positions in the three powers of the State, following the footsteps of regional forerunners¹⁴. In this sense, the newly adopted law N° 010-2022-MIMP, which concerns civil servants, represents a notable step forward in the integration of gender perspective in the Peruvian administration. However, as it is illustrated in the study, *political harassment* remains a pending challenge to be dealt with for building the parity democracy Peru deserves.

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¹⁴ With reference to Law N° 27499, or Law Micaela, sanctioned in Argentina on December 19th, 2018, available at: <https://www.argentina.gob.ar/normativa/nacional/ley-27499-318666/texto>.

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Problem:

Length of the analysis?

Detailing the party?