

Political participation, leading role and technological access for women. Spokeswomen of the Communal Integration System (SINCO) 2014-2019

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Abstract

The political participation and the leading role of women is a questioning of androcentric political power structures. This phenomenon is manifested in Venezuela through a process of re-signification of the exercise of politics by women, who are elected to assume decision-making responsibilities within the grassroots organizations of the People's Power (OBPP) to carry out projects based on their community needs that are charged to the System of Communal Integration (SINCO) with the objective of requesting financial support from the State, this tool systematizes the information obtained from organized citizens. With the intention of strengthening the exercise of e-government, an exploratory study was carried out using a methodology with a quantitative approach guided by a bivariate descriptive analysis of the database of projects registered in SINCO to identify patterns and the relationship between all variables associated with gender. The analysis of the data shows the participation and leading role of women, which also implies a qualitative transformation in the logic of the exercise of political power, since women have been executing projects that have historically been associated with male gender roles.

Keywords: political participation, women, Grassroots Organizations of People's Power, participatory democracy, information and communication technologies.

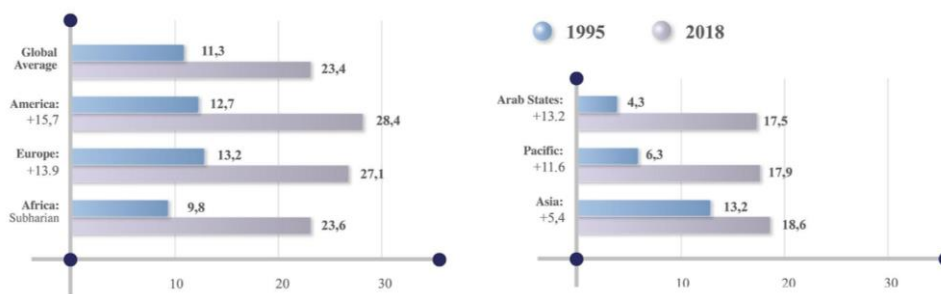
1. Introduction

The sexual division of labor, understood by Tabet as a form of social and hierarchical division, makes a clear distinction between the public-productive sphere and the private-reproductive sphere according to people's sex (cp. Curiel and Falquet, 2005). Its historical consolidation in gender roles has given rise to multiple social inequalities and explicit forms of exclusion of women. Seventy percent of the world's poor are women and girls (El Entrompe de Falopio, 2018), which shows that a phenomenon of feminization of poverty persists (United Nations, 1995) as an expression of the patriarchal-capitalist

system, which through various forms limits the possibilities of women's political, social, cultural and economic self-determination.

On the political plane, these limitations are expressed concretely in the differentiated participation of women in traditional power structures, which is evident in international, national, regional and local scenarios. An example of this phenomenon is the proportion of parliamentary seats held by women, 28.4% worldwide by 2018, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Regional averages of women in parliaments, 1995 and 2018



Source: Parliamentary Union

In order to confront this context of inequality that affects women in the possibility of fully exercising their rights, from various currents of thought, the international community, national governments, social and political movements agree on the objective of overcoming these inequalities. Likewise, the United Nations, in its program for sustainable development, through the fifth objective, seeks to overcome gender inequality in order to put an end to all forms of discrimination against women and girls, since it considers it a fundamental factor for economic growth and development (United Nations, 2012).

1.1. The political participation of women in Venezuelan democracy

The construction of Latin American women as political subjects has been a difficult path, taking into account the patriarchal context in which they are inserted, which in its political dimension is expressed in the regional averages of women in parliaments, as shown in Figure 1, where America has an average of 28.4% in 2018. According to Luna (1994, cp. Arias, González, and Guevara, 2009), in the process of building women as political subjects, the main difficulty is marginalization in the private-domestic dimension. Women have been excluded from participating in the public sphere, yet some have managed to re-dimension and redefine the field of politics and the way it is understood, politicizing spaces of everyday life. Arias, González and Hernández (2009) state that the strength of women's movements lies in their appearance in spaces other than formal politics, opening up new ways of participation, transforming the way in which democracy is understood assumed, initiating and consolidating, along the way, their construction as political subjects.

In Venezuela, the Commune is the political space in which the organized people build power from the territory through communal self-government, together with the Communal Councils are called Grassroots Organizations of People's Power (OBPP, by its Spanish acronym), which are instances "constituted by citizens for the search of collective welfare" (Gaceta Oficial No. 6,011, 2010). Women have assumed in the base organizations the paradigm of participatory and protagonist democracy (Vargas, 2010), which arises from the refoundation of the Republic in 1999, where "the participation of the people in the formation, execution and control of public management is the necessary means to achieve the protagonism that guarantees their complete development, both individually and collectively" (Gaceta Oficial Extraordinaria No. 36,860, 1999).

This way of conceiving democracy opened in Venezuela a social process of massive participation of the people, which throughout 20 years has been expressed in 25 electoral processes (National Electoral Council, 2019) and which has been structured through diverse grassroots organizational instances. As of 2006, with the approval of the Organic Law of the Communal Councils, the national government calls for the formation of cells of popular participation that are constituted as basic nuclei of community organization, with 48,043 Communal Councils to date. Later in 2010 they transcended to a higher level of aggregation called Commune, of which there are 3,132 at the national level to date (Ministry of the Popular for the Communes and Social Movements, 2019). The OBPPs have a legal character and are part of the formal structure of the Venezuelan State, yet their logic of operation is different from that of the State, with the OBPPs being a space for building alternative power to the State.

In an effort to incorporate these spaces for strategic participation of the people into a logic of electronic governance, which involves the use of information technologies to strengthen interaction with local actors and the transformation of public management by promoting its transparency (Frey, 2005), In 2014, the Community Integration System (SINCO, by its Spanish acronym) was created, promoted by the Federal Government Council (CFG, by its Spanish acronym), to finance OBPP through the loading and monitoring of projects built by these organizations (Sánchez, Márquez and Vernález, 2019). This system allows for the planning and management of public policy that promotes community organization through principles such as direct communication between the governors and the organized people, transparency, sovereignty and co-responsibility.

This tool has made it possible to register 20,762 Communal Councils and 865 Communes (extraction from the database used in this research), consolidate information management processes, reach the 24 states of the country and promote grassroots organizations as collective subjects, which implies a substantive rethinking of the traditional logic of individual construction of electronic governance technologies.

The platform arises as an emerging technology at the service of a population historically excluded from the digital logic, such as the OBPP, and for which there is no

communication tool to emulate and stimulate the levels of their collective participation at the level that SINCO makes it possible.

The members of each OBPP delegate five (5) spokespersons who will represent the project in the system in each of its phases, from its loading into the system, physical and financial execution, to the closing of the process. They will have specific responsibilities in the different stages of the project, mainly in loading information related to their role and validating that information by other spokespersons. This strengthens internal communication to ensure greater consistency of the information provided by each registered member.

In the idea of reconfiguring the relationship between the OBPP and the platform by giving it an out-of-platform twist that strengthens the dynamics of collective participation, SINCO makes it possible to make visible the leading role played by women in the OBPPs, which account for 53.41% of the spokespersons registered in the projects uploaded to SINCO during the 2014-2019 period, an element that allows us to reflect on how this tool works to strengthen women's leading participation in local power spaces.

Based on the centralization and systematization of the data that SINCO registers on the project load activity, the participation of women in the OBPP and their impact on overcoming gender inequalities was characterized as a central objective of this article, so that it allows the elaboration of inputs that correspond even more to the realities and needs of popular power and its main subjects, women.

2. Purpose

The objective of this research is to characterize the political participation of women in the positions of spokespersons of community organizations, in our case the Grassroots Organizations of People's Power (OBPP), and the role of technology as a bridge to make visible and strengthen their participation.

3. Methodology

In the following study, a methodology with a quantitative focus was applied, oriented by a bivariate descriptive analysis, where pairs of variables are crossed to identify the relationship between them, one of these being the sex variable. For this purpose, the database of project records loaded on the digital platform of the Community Integration System (SINCO) was used, which includes 38,346 projects, 21,627 Grassroots Organizations of the People's Power and 112,748 spokespersons registered as of September 2019.

At first, information on the projects and spokespersons of the communal councils was extracted by accessing SINCO's original database using the statistical programming language R with the DBI, Rpostgresql packages. This database was modified to add the gender variable, which was not originally in the system since this information is not requested during project registration at SINCO. For this, it was crossed with the database

of the Administrative Service of Identification, Migration and Foreigners (SAIME), this database was accessed by loading it in mongoDB, and it was taken to the R environment with the MongoLITE library.

Both databases were prepared for the crossing by executing the necessary joins until the appropriate input for the analysis was generated. This generated the indicator of preponderance of women in each community council and in each project. The final data was exported in .csv and .xls formats. For the analysis process, we used R version 3.6.0 (2019-04-26) - "Planting of a Tree", installed in the Debian 9 Stretch operating system, in a Rstudio version 1.1.453 environment. We used the DBI library, Rpostgresql, mongoLITE in the data extraction stage; the tidyr library, dplyr in the data manipulation stage; and openxlsx to export the resulting database in .csv or .xls.

This database contains the following variables:

- The investment sector to which the project corresponds: socio-productive (projects associated with the development of activities generating useful goods and services for the community, executed by internal productive networks) or public services (projects on services associated with social welfare).
- Category of the project, referring to the area of application of the project.
- The fiscal period, to which the project corresponds, from 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018 to 2019.
- State that corresponds to the geographical location in which the project was uploaded.
- Type of OBPP that loads the project, being these Communal Council or Commune.
- The sex of the (5) spokespersons for each project.
- Position of each spokesperson in SINCO: in the case of the Communal Council, this is divided into one (1) spokesperson in the Executive Unit, two (2) spokespersons in the Financial Administrative Unit and two (2) spokespersons in the Comptroller's Unit. In the case of the Commune, it is divided into two (2) spokespersons for the Executive Council, one (1) for the Communal Banking, one (1) for the Management Committee and one (1) for the Communal Comptroller.

The treatment resulted in three (3) large sets of information, which contain the history of 38,346 projects:

The first set includes all the projects loaded by the OBPP, with their associated variables, without repeating the times that the same person was chosen for different projects within the OBPP, which allows counting the total number of women who actually participated from 2014 to 2019. The graphs made with this data set are represented with the colors: light blue and gray.

In order to identify the preponderance of women in the spokespersons of each Communal Council or Commune, we identified all those OBPP that had a majority of women and

those that did not, obtaining a new variable called "preponderance of women". This data indicates if the spokespersons of that OBPP are mostly women (Yes) or not (No), that is, if of the 5 spokespersons there are at least 3 women or vice versa. The graphs made with this data set are represented with the colors: gray and dark blue. The third dataset also tells us about the preponderance of women and men associated with the projects, that is, unlike the previous dataset; this one takes into account the number of times that people repeated themselves in the different projects from 2014 to 2019. For the descriptive analysis, statistical techniques of frequency and graphing were used, which were bar charts, pie charts and georeferencing of the behavior of the variables on the national map. These processes were carried out through the interactive graphing software Tableau in its Public version number 2019.2 (20192.19.0515.1630). The graphs made with this data set are represented by the colors: light orange and dark blue.

4. Main findings

From the data analysis, three categories are generated that significantly bring together their descriptive behavior. The first, called women's participation in SINCO, refers to the ways in which the participation and protagonism of women in the system is expressed; the second, called collective leadership, refers to the work of the OBPP in their condition as collective subjects, considering two types of OBPP: those with a "preponderance of women" and those with a "preponderance of men", with the intention of understanding whether collective leadership is exercised differently between men and women. Finally, it analyzes the collective management that corresponds to the interests and roles assumed by men and women from the projects they promote in their community, understanding the difference in gender roles between them.

4.1. Women's participation in SINCO

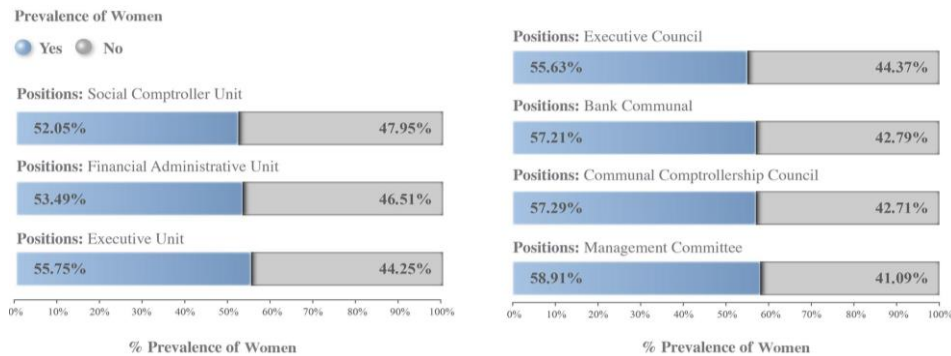
As it has been seen previously, the majority of SINCO's spokespersons are women, expressed in 53.41%, that is to say, the OBPP tends to elect women to lead the processes linked to the projects that are loaded into the system, an element that makes visible, not only the high participation of women in the spaces of local power, but also their legitimacy given by the democratic exercise of their election.

This majority participation is identified when using data set number three (3), where it is observed that 62.17% of the projects have spokespersons who are exercised by women, while 37.83% are exercised by men, which evidences an important participation and the protagonism that women have in the management of the projects promoted by the community organization. Comparing this with the total percentage of women in the BPGs, which is 53.41%, it is evident that there is a difference of 9 points above the percentage of women who are repeatedly in charge of the projects, which could indicate that these women are religiously represented by the community, considering that it is the members of each BPG who elect their spokespersons.

With respect to the differentiation by sex of the positions in the spokespersons, the behavior of the preponderance of women was graphed with data one (1) seen in Figure 2,

where it is possible to observe how a decision is made to choose or not to choose a woman for a given position.

Figure 2: percentage of preponderance of women associated with spokesperson positions in the Communal Councils and Communes in the projects charged to SINCO during the period 2014-2019



Source: own production

Figure 2 details how in the Communal Councils' spokespersons between the Social Comptroller's Unit and the Financial Administrative Unit there is little difference between men and women, while in the Executive Unit's position the difference is greater with respect to the previous positions. As for the Commune spokespersons, in each one of them women are also in the majority, which speaks to the leading role that women have in the OBPPs since they are assuming responsibility in the spokespersons linked to the management and important decision-making of the projects. In this sense, there is no evidence of an influence of gender roles in the distribution of internal responsibilities, but on the contrary, a majority of women in all the spokespersons.

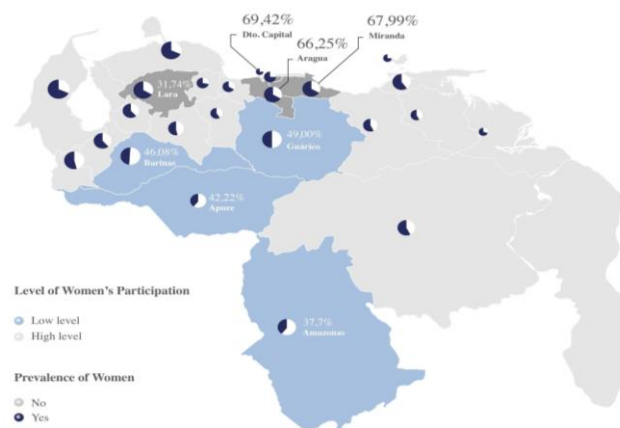
4.2. Collective leadership

With regard to the preponderance by sex of collective leadership expressed in the behavior of the project load by OBPP, the analysis was carried out with data set two (2), obtaining a differentiation by sex where women are in the majority and the incidence of their leadership on local power fronts is evident. This majority participation of women is expressed in 58.1% preponderance by sex of the spokespersons of Community Councils and Communes in the projects charged to SINCO during the period 2014-2019. This means that out of every 5 spokespersons, at least three are women, while in 41.09% of the Communal Councils the representation is mostly men, that is, out of every 5 spokespersons, at least three are men.

In both Communal Councils and Communes, the majority of the members are women. However, the percentage of Communes with predominantly female leadership (73.39% in 2015 and 83.83% in 2019) is even higher than that of Commune Councils (61.44% in 2014 and 63.69% in 2019), which is interesting in terms of the political characteristic of the Communes, being a space of greater territorial reach and of articulation among the

Communal Councils, understanding that women are linked to local spaces of action associated with the daily resolution of the most immediate needs of families and the community expressed in a political participation that questions traditional political practice. It also shows the representation and leadership of the majority of the voices of women over the last six years.

Figure 3: percentage of preponderance of women in Community and Communal Councils' spokespersons and their level of participation throughout the national territory in the projects registered with SINCO during the period 2014-2019.



Source: own production

In terms of the preponderance of OBPP by sex throughout the country, the participation of women and men as shown in Figure 3, shows that OBPP choose women as spokespersons in most of the country's states (20 of 24), except in Guárico (49%); Barinas (46.8%); Apure (42.2%) and Amazonas (37.7%) where their level of participation is low.

It is crucial to study in later works the preponderance of men as spokespersons in the states of Apure, Amazonas, Guárico and Barinas. In the case of the state of Amazonas, the gender ratio of 50.5% men and 49.5% women should be considered (National Institute of Statistics, 2011), although women are demographically a minority, the percentage of their participation is much lower than this ratio. To better understand this phenomenon of women's minority participation will require an intersectional analysis that takes into account ethnicity, social class and gender, and the relationship of these "multiple dimensions of inequalities and forms of oppression with the social identity of people" (Boddenberg, 2018). Considering that the majority of the population of Amazonas is recognized (53.7%) as a member of an indigenous community (National Institute of Statistics, 2011), it can be inferred that this characteristic contributes to the way in which women themselves view their political participation.

On the other hand, the Capital District (69.42%); Lara (68.26%); Miranda (67.99%) and Aragua (66.25%), as part of the Central-Western region and the country's Capital, stand out for a high level of women's participation in the spokespersons of the OBPP.

However, when analyzing data set number three, a change can be observed in both the state of Guárico and the state of Barinas, where the repeated election of women to carry out projects in their OBPP, makes them the majority with 54.9% and 54.1% respectively, with a difference of five (5) points over the data of Guárico in figure 3, and eight (8) points over the previous data of Barinas. This shows a type of voice that is relegitimized over time by the community.

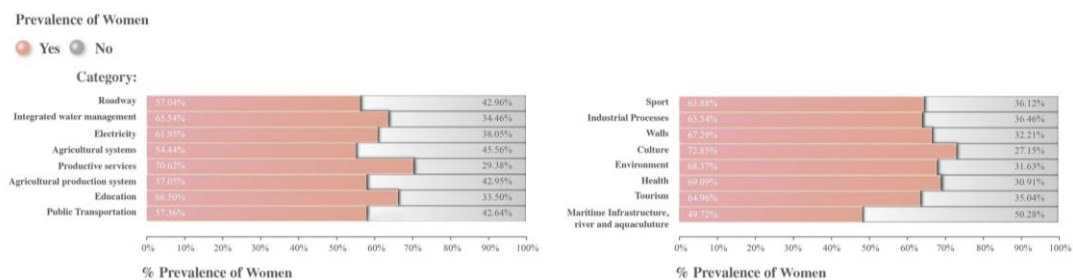
4.3. Collective management

The collective management of the OBPP is analyzed based on the preponderance of gender in the spokespersons of the loaded projects, that is, using data three, in order to consider how the variation of the project load, in terms of its essential characteristics, is influenced by the gender variable.

The investment sector is one of the relevant characteristics of the project load, where it is possible to identify the type of projects that communities are presenting as priorities. According to the cross-checking of the data, the vast majority of the projects registered are public service projects, in both cases maintaining the preponderance of women's voices, with a greater participation of women in public service projects with 63.82% compared to 56% in the socio-productive sector.

The participation in the management of the processes that men and women carry out and the type of projects that are promoted could have an impact on the processes of self-government, the construction of power in the territory and the role that women assume in front of the community. It will be necessary to analyze in subsequent works the reasons that mobilize the Communal Councils and Communes to the burden of public service projects and to women to assume in greater proportion the management of these projects to characterize this incidence in the construction of power.

Figure 4: percentage of preponderance of women by category of projects loaded into SINCO during the period 2014-2019.



Source: own production

When analyzing the behavior of the categories associated with public services, Figure 4 shows that the trend in projects with a preponderance of women continues in categories such as roads, integrated water management, electricity, industrial processes and walls. This implies a questioning of gender roles since women are assuming the management of

processes historically and culturally associated with men. Garrido, Álvaro and Rosas (2018), citing Simmel, explain how a differentiation between masculine and feminine traits is clearly established in the work environment. They consider that the former belong to an "objective world" related to "activity, creativity and external projection" while the latter are from a "subjective world" associated with affectivity, reproduction and family life.

Thus, it can be observed how the participation of women in the spokespersons of the projects breaks with this logic, and not only because of the quantitative presence of women in this type of projects that reflects the will of women to break with the gender role, but also because of the way in which women have assumed the political participation in the community spaces, demonstrating their capacities and the legitimacy of their power in front of this responsibility of the local planning and management.

5. Conclusions

The main findings of the research are presented below:

- It is observed that the Communal and Town Councils tend to elect mostly women to serve as spokespersons for SINCO. This majority of women is expressed in all the project-loading processes in the system.
- The participation of women in the OBPP is of a protagonist nature, since they participate in all the spokespersons in a majority manner; the reproduction of gender roles in the election of positions is not evident.
- The dynamic established by SINCO with its logic of collective participation not only makes women's protagonist participation visible, but also strengthens it insofar as it makes the exercise of power by the OBPP possible, thus being a platform that, based on this relationship, breaks with the individual dynamics that could distance women from their egalitarian participation.
- Women have been assuming projects that historically have been associated with male roles. This gives a change to the definition of politics not only in quantitative terms because it shows the significant presence of women in front of men in the projects' spokespersons, but there is a transformation in qualitative terms when challenging and questioning the gender roles that have historically been assumed preventing them from being in positions of power throughout the years.
- According to the analysis process, ICTs have the potential to drive change in the historical realities that have been pointed out in women's political participation.
- From the analysis of the results, it is evident that there is a need to deepen the political participation of women in rural and urban sectors of the Llanos and indigenous states, in relation to other states where women's participation is greater, such as the central region of the country. Likewise, to investigate the reasons that drive them to participate politically in their communities.
- These concerns can be developed in a qualitative research that allows us to go deeper into the meanings that underlie the data worked on in this investigation.

All of these questions are condensed in the table of research specifications, which can be seen in table 1, as a road map to deepen the categories needed to guide the search for meaning behind women's political practice.

Table 1: table of specifications of women's political participation and protagonism as a guide for future research

<i>Category</i>	<i>Variable</i>	<i>Dimensions</i>
Gender inequalities	Women's political participation	Women's political agenda
		Mobilization of women
		Roles within the organization
	Women's protagonism	Influence on important decision making
		Process Management
	Gender Technological Access	Use of technological tools
		Collective access

6. Recommendations

Based on the data obtained so far, it is necessary to incorporate the gender perspective into the system as an element of recognition of the majority participation of women in the system's logic. This implies not only the incorporation of a gender language in discursive terms, in modules and descriptions of the platform, but also the inclusion of the gender variable in the project load template and in those modules associated with personal information load as an indispensable requirement. Thus, the characterization of women's participation would be a fluid path for decision making in the exercise of planning, research and identification of patterns of community reality.

Table 2: acronyms

Acronym	Meaning
CFG	Federal Government Council (Consejo Federal de Gobierno)
SINCO	Communal Integration System (Sistema de Integración Comunal)
OBPP	Grassroots Organizations of People's Power: Communal Councils and Communes (Organizaciones de Base del Poder Popular: Consejos comunales y Comunas)

ICTs	Information and Communication Technologies (Tecnologías de la Comunicación y la Información)
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