

## **Abstract**

In La Paz, Bolivia, 80% of street vendors are women, as are the heads of most street vendor associations. However, the majority of leadership positions in Bolivia's city- and nation-wide street vendor federations are occupied by men. Why do men represent majority-female sectors like street vending? I argue that the informal practices of the bureaucracy shape gender dynamics in civil society by influencing who can become a leader. In particular, where civil society organizations' survival depends on their relationships with bureaucrats, the preferences of key bureaucrats deeply influence who attains and retains leadership positions in civil society organizations. The article draws on original interview, survey and ethnographic evidence from street vendor organizations and their interactions with the La Paz, Bolivia city government.

## **Acknowledgments**

Calla Hummel is a doctoral candidate in Political Science at the University of Texas at Austin. This project was supported by a Graduate Research Fellowship (award number 2013163892) from the National Science Foundation. She would like to thank Cecilia Salazar, Raúl Madrid, Rodolfo Disi Pavlic, and Hernan Pruden for comments on earlier drafts, CIDES for institutional support during the project, and participating street vendors and their associations for their collaboration. Please contact the author with any questions by email at [calla.hummel@utexas.edu](mailto:calla.hummel@utexas.edu) or through [www.callahummel.com](http://www.callahummel.com).

## **Street Vendors and the Politics of Gender Representation**

In La Paz, Bolivia, street vendor stalls crowd most major streets, providing most of the city's retail and a good portion of its employment opportunities. Women disproportionately work the stalls, accounting for 80% of all vendors.<sup>1</sup> Nearly 75% of the vendors affiliate with a street vendor association and each association in turn belongs to a city-wide federation, which answers to Bolivia's National Confederation of Street Vendors, Small Retailers, Artisans, and Food Sellers (La Confederación Nacional de Gremialistas, Minoristas, Artesanos, y Vivanderos). While the vast majority of people working on the streets are women, the leaders of these associations and federations are often men. In fact, the only domain of Bolivian street vending in which men make up a majority is in the upper echelons of leadership. Why do men represent street vendors when most of the workers are actually women?

I argue that the informal practices of the bureaucracy shape gender dynamics in civil society by influencing who can become a leader. In particular, where civil society organizations' survival depends on their relationships with bureaucrats, the preferences of key bureaucrats deeply influence who attains and retains leadership positions in civil society organizations. Furthermore, members of civil society organizations become complicit in degrading their own representation where catering to bureaucrats' preferences furthers individual and organizational interests. While existing work documents how bureaucracies reinforce gender hierarchies internally (Ramsay & Parker 1991), this paper extends this finding by demonstrating that bureaucracies can also reinforce gender hierarchies in the leadership structures of civil society organizations.

To develop this argument, I use original interview, survey and ethnographic evidence from street vendor organizations and their interactions with the La Paz, Bolivia city government. La Paz is home to hundreds of street vendor associations with a mix of gender dynamics and four federations, one of which is led by a woman. Using La Paz as a case, we can look at both why men represent majority female sectors, and why the few women who represent vendors are able to succeed. In the following section, I ground this study in the literatures on gender politics, informal work, and bureaucracy, before developing the case in the third section. I conclude with implications for gender equality in civil society.

### **Street Vending in La Paz**

Approximately 80% of working-age people in Bolivia hold informal jobs, such as domestic workers, bus assistants, small importers, drivers, construction workers, and above all, street vendors (Schneider 2010, Lazar 2008, Vuletin 2008, World Bank 2008). According to La Paz city officials and vendor representatives, 50,000-60,000 people – 5% of the capitol's population – work as street vendors (L.M., personal communication, March 13<sup>th</sup>, 2015, J.M., personal communication, March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2015). Many make a decades-long career out of street vending – survey respondents had been vending for an average of 23 years -- and 31,906 people hold a city vending license, which takes years to obtain (Gobierno Autónomo Municipal de La Paz, 2015).

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<sup>1</sup> According to an original survey of 207 randomly selected street vendors from 13 randomly selected districts in La Paz. The survey was conducted by the author and a team of Bolivian sociologists in April 2015. All descriptive statistics about La Paz street vendors come from the survey unless otherwise noted, and have a 7% margin of error.

Others rotate in and out of street vending to fill gaps in employment and make ends meet; the occupation is so common that many teachers, lawyers, engineers, and others supplement their incomes by working part-time in weekend or holiday street markets (Tassi et al 2013). While the largest street markets – the Rodriguez produce market, the Tumusla clothing market, and the mixed goods Max Paredes market – push up against each other in the city’s western neighborhoods, street vendors work on nearly every street in the city.

Established vendors sell high-margin products like clothes and beauty products at licensed stalls, which can be permanent metal kiosks called *anaqueles* or wood and iron platforms known as *tarimas*. New or poor vendors, *ambulantes*, walk continuously while selling anything from gum to plants to coat hangers from small boxes or sacks. Most vendors make roughly minimum wage<sup>2</sup> but a significant minority make a middle class living – for example, 34% of survey respondents were homeowners -- and a few have become wealthy (Tassi et al 2013). Eighty percent of street vendors are women, the average age is 45, and over half identify as indigenous, primarily Aymara. In contrast to street vendor populations in other large cities, a staggering 75% of La Paz’s street vendors belong to a street vendor organization (WIEGO, 2014, L.M., personal communication, March 13<sup>th</sup>, 2015, J.M., personal communication, March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2015).

Despite decades of literature casting the Bolivian government as absent or weak (Tassi et al 2015, Tassi et al 2013, Tassi 2012, Rice & Patrick 2008, Mainwaring & Scully 1995), vendors’ livelihoods and organizations have been deeply shaped by state intervention. Vending has been one of the city’s main occupational categories since its founding and the first recorded vendor association formed in the 1850s (Rivera & Lehm 1988). Often founded by miners-turned-vendors returning from Chile with anarcho-syndicalist philosophy, many more of these associations formed between 1860 and 1930 and earned a place in the city’s political landscape demonstrating for workers’ rights and benefits (Rivera & Lehm 1988, Dibbits et al 1989, Peredo Beltran 1992). The government intentionally broke these associations by sending their leaders to the frontlines during the 1932-1935 War of the Chaco, where the vast majority died. However, several women’s associations, particularly of flower sellers (Peredo n.d), persisted for over a decade longer (Rivera & Lehm 1988, Dibbits et al 1989). After the 1952 revolution, the government organized some vendors into department-wide federations. With the economic crises of the 1980s, the Bolivian unemployed turned to vending to survive and the sector grew dramatically (Rojas 1992). The influx of people revived the vending associations, which then took over many of the federations and empowered a recently-founded national confederation.

One of the organizations’ primary functions is to lobby and navigate the bureaucracy on behalf of their members. The bureaucracy has the power to destroy vendors’ livelihoods by ordering the municipal guard to forcibly remove them and confiscate their merchandise, or the power to enrich a vendor by issuing multiple licenses, or licenses for high-margin goods and high-volume areas. In fact, many associations were founded specifically to collectively bargain with the bureaucracy (C., personal communication, February 27<sup>th</sup>, 2015, L.J., personal communication, March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2015, V.R., personal communication, May 14<sup>th</sup>, 2015). This uneasy relationship with the bureaucracy is a feature of street vending across the globe. Using evidence from Latin

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<sup>2</sup> In 2014, the minimum wage was 1,656 bolivianos, or \$240 U.S. dollars.

America, Asia, and Africa, Alisha Holland (2014), Rina Agarwala (2013) and Catherine Boone (1993) argue that political decisions create or destroy informal markets and that politicians and bureaucrats deploy this power strategically to build their bases. Luciana Itikawa (2006) argues that in Brazil, bureaucrats manipulate street vendors' semi-legal status to extract votes, personal favors, and millions of dollars in bribes in exchange for leniency. Bhowmik (2010) finds similar dynamics at work in cities all over the world. This study extends these findings to show how street vendors' relationships with bureaucrats determine in part who gains power within vendor organizations.

### **Gender, Bureaucracy and Informal Practice**

To encourage gender equality in Bolivian society at large, the administration of Evo Morales passed several groundbreaking policies on gender parity and gender-based discrimination. The bureaucracy is in charge of implementing many of these policies, yet the informal practices and preferences of bureaucrats continue to undermine women's symbolic and substantive representation. As gender quotas, gender violence laws, and other gender equality legislation proliferates around the world, Bolivia and Bolivian activists have repeatedly been early adopters of ambitious projects (Blofield 2012, Hughes 2011, Htun 2004). For example, the 2010 electoral law guarantees that 50% of candidates on party lists are women (Htun & Ossa 2013). The provision has had astounding success in a short period of time: in the 2014 national elections, 52% of the winning congressional representatives were women (Quota Project 2015). Still, implementation has been problematic: the press reports frequent cases of women candidates and politicians that are harassed to resign so that their male alternates take their place (Ariñez 2015a, Ariñez 2015b, Montero 2015).

A broad 2013 law aims to reduce discrimination and violence against women at all levels by reforming laws and sentencing, funding new domestic violence programs, and even outlawing sexist advertising. On paper, the law is one of the farthest-reaching domestic violence laws in existence, but its implementation falls short. For example, while more women are denouncing cases of violence, the justice system has been unable to keep up: a year and a half after the passage of the law, only eight people – 4% of those charged -- had been sentenced for femicide under the law, out of 206 femicide cases (CIDEM 2014, Shahriari 2015).

Similar implementation issues plague civil society organizations. On paper, vendor organizations are extremely representative and democratic, which would lead us to expect that their leaders symbolically and substantively represent their bases. In other words, we should expect to see indigenous women as leaders and we would expect these leaders to advocate for issues that their female-dominated bases report as important, like healthcare and child care, as well as security at their puestos. Every organization has a book of statutes and rules that is ratified by a government entity and a lawyer at its founding and that every member must pledge to follow (J.M., personal communication, September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2014, R.M., personal communication, February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2015, M.P., personal communication, March 10<sup>th</sup>, 2015). Members elect all of the organizations' leaders and the statutes specify when leadership elections must be held, how votes are cast, what roles and responsibilities leaders have, and a clear line of accountability for filing and ruling on complaints and abuses of power. In interviews, vendors reported that government entities have been

encouraging them to reform statutes to make them even more democratic by holding more regular elections and enshrining turnover in leadership (D.H., personal communication, September 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2014). These practices should manifest in leaders that symbolically and substantively represent their base. Yet in practice, leaders have dozens of strategies for keeping power within a small cadre of veterans, which tend to be more male than their base and represent a narrow range of interests.

More theoretically, O'Donnell (1996) argues that constellations of informal practices like street vending and clientelism exist in tension with democracy's formal institutions and can systematically undermine formal policies. Other scholars find evidence for this contention in a range of substantive arenas, and add that people replace formal policies with informal procedures. Pierette Hondagneu-Sotelo (2001) and Merike Blofield (2009, 2012) find that in domestic work, employers and employees often agree on informal contracts paid in cash. While the poor women that dominate the sector receive slightly more and faster cash through informal contracts, their employers save much more through these arrangements by evading taxes, reporting requirements, and safety standards. Javier Auyero (2000) documents the constellation of informal relations and practices that form the base of political participation in poor neighborhoods in Argentina and the personal networks that determine job placement or program access more than the official criteria. Through the case of street vendor organizations, this study contributes to this body of work by demonstrating how bureaucrats' preferences and personal relationships undermine formal gender equality policies and civil society organizations' formal commitments to democratic practices. The following research documents how vendors' relationships with bureaucrats encourage them to undermine democratic provisions in their own statutes and the representativeness of their organizations.

## **Methods**

From August 2014 to May 2015, I conducted an ethnography with one of La Paz's four vendor federations and one new association. The ethnography involved participant observation of ubiquitous meetings at the federation and the Unidad de Mercados, from 8 *ampliados* and 12 *audiencias* to daily group conversations about documentation and inner-group conflicts. I also observed and participated in two protest marches and, as the ethnography took place during the national and municipal elections, two political campaign marches. I frequently joined vendors at their *puestos*, where we had in-depth conversations about their work and where, depending on the vendors' comfort level and needs, I helped attend to customers, clean, set up, and babysit. Finally, I sold children's clothes once a week with the *mañaneras* in the Tumusla clothing market for two months in 2015. The majority of the evidence that I discuss in the following section comes from this ethnographic research.

In addition to the ethnography, I conducted 45 semi-structured interviews with vendors and bureaucrats in La Paz and El Alto, and a survey of 207 vendors in 16 different *paceño* neighborhoods. With a team of five survey administrators of varying appearances, genders, ethnic identities, and social backgrounds, we conducted a survey over two weeks in April 2015. We randomized the neighborhoods we went to and the vendors we approached; the surveyed sample includes a range of ages, ethnicities, education levels, and types of vendors with a wide

variety of experiences. The descriptive demographic statistics are close to what bureaucrats, vendor leaders, and experienced rank and file vendors estimate to be the demographic characteristics of the sector. However, we cannot know if the survey is representative of all vendors in La Paz because there is no vendor census that includes the true population parameters.<sup>3</sup> Still, through district- and individual-level randomization, we attempted to take a random sample of the vendor population. In the following section, I use evidence from the survey and interviews to provide broader context for the ethnographic data.

### **Vendiendo, Tramitando y Representando en La Paz**

Bureaucrats influence who gains power within street vendor organizations in three ways. First, bureaucrats hold personal preferences about who they work with, and these preferences almost always favor male vendors. Second, the main attribute that rank and file vendors look for in leadership candidates is an ability to confront and work with bureaucrats, and men are perceived by both bureaucrats and other vendors as more effective than their female counterparts in the interactions that build this attribute. Finally, the bureaucratic preferences and processes that subtly but consistently give male vendors power over female vendors compounds widespread and widely documented gender discrimination that give men more opportunities and resources to become leaders in civil society and other arenas. As a result of all three factors, men rise quickly through leadership structures while women often experience burnout before they reach the top rungs of power.

#### *Personalities and personal relationships*

Jaime Santana<sup>4</sup> has led La Paz's largest street vendor federation for 15 years. He has been a union activist since he was 17, and his activist and leadership credentials are impressive: he went into exile in Chile during the Banzer dictatorship in Bolivia, worked in a Marxist research institute in Chile before fleeing to France when Pinochet came to power, and completed his education in Switzerland before returning to Bolivia in 1979 to rejoin the union movement. Dr. Angel Gomez, director of the city's Unidad de Mercados, boasts elite legal credentials that are almost a requirement for climbing the city's bureaucratic ladder. Despite representing very different sectors, both are older, highly educated white men from elite families. Dr. Gomez notes that his job becomes much easier when he has a stable working relationship with someone who understands him and his work, like Santana. He says he wishes he could work with more people like Santana, or only deal with Santana, and not four different federation leaders:

“[It is better have] one, but it really depends on who is in charge. It's better if there's one [federation] but only if it's someone that you can work with; I'd only want one with Jaime Santana as head.”

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<sup>3</sup> The city government has a database of all registered and licensed vendors, but does not have any information on the substantial number of unlicensed vendors in the city. Additionally, despite multiple formal requests, a months-long bureaucratic process, and orders from his superiors, the interim director of the Unidad would not give me access to the database and eventually stopped showing up for work.

<sup>4</sup> All names are pseudonyms and some personal details have been altered to protect the identity of the research participants.

Both men have an established working relationship, which they reinforce through a social relationship. At the federation's annual birthday party, at which Dr. Gomez was a guest of honor, most of the several hundred attendees left as lunch gave way to drinking and dancing, leaving two dozen veteran leaders with a bottle of whiskey and several cases of beer. After a few more hours, Dr. Gomez, Santana, and the federation's second in command, Roberto Rodrigo Quisbert, went to a bar to continue drinking. In group meetings in the subsequent weeks, both referred to this night with light jokes. Developing such a relationship with a high level bureaucrat is possible for female vendor leaders but much more difficult, and for a variety of reasons none of the dozen female association leaders dancing at the end of the party elected to continue drinking with the three men.

The men that act on bureaucrats' preferences and build working and social relationships with them then become gatekeepers for other vendors. In subsequent weeks, the female leaders continued to go to the Unidad almost exclusively in the company of Santana. Practically all have mentioned that they will be turned away if they come by themselves instead of with Santana. One woman explained, "We can't come see Dr. Gomez by ourselves, Don Jaime says that these people are with me and only then can we come (G., personal communication, October 2<sup>nd</sup> 2014)." Santana's working relationship with Dr. Gomez makes him a powerful gatekeeper for the thousands of vendors and dozens of association leaders he represents. By only seeing the vendors that come in a group with Santana and not everyone individually, Dr. Gomez delegates the screening of vendor cases to Santana and greatly simplifies a very busy job. However, Dr. Gomez's preference to deal with vendors through Santana has the side effect of empowering Santana while making it difficult for other vendor leaders to build personal and working relationships with a key bureaucrat.

When Dr. Gomez does develop relationships with women that come to the Unidad, he does not treat them as civil society representatives or leaders; he treats them as poor women that can bring him perks. Women acquiesce to his time-consuming and occasionally demeaning requests because they can ask him for a small personal favor later, though this extra work does not connote organizational sway or power that they can parlay into a future leadership position.

For example, Isabel, a vendor and university student, noted that he began to remember her after she started to bring him coffee from an expensive café. She later used this connection to request a one-on-one meeting about a stalled application. Another cooked paella for Gomez and his staff after she had asked him to change a detail on her license. Several others have mentioned that he expects women to not only go to political marches on the weekend but also bring food to share with other marchers, like city employees. Even the most powerful women in the federation are expected to bring food to Saturday morning marches, while the men are simply expected to show up. A month before the 2015 municipal elections, one association leader complained that while she cooked food to share, Santana hadn't even shown up to the last march (E., personal communication, February 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2015). One of the most powerful women in the federation said about the marches, "It takes so long and we do so much. The comida doesn't cook itself (L., personal communication, March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2015)."

In an attempt to delegate work and squeeze perks out of his job, a key bureaucrat develops working and social relationships with other older, educated men, who screen cases for him and manage the vendors they bring to Unidad. He also develops relationships with vendor women who try to cater to his preferences and requests, but instead of gatekeeping roles, he delegates traditional women's work like making and bringing food to events. Women comply because Dr. Gomez is more likely to do them personal favors later. Still, compared to screening cases, cooking for a march requires more hours of work, more money, and connotes little to no organizational power on the doer.

### *Leadership qualities*

The rank and file vendors (called "the base" in Bolivia) and the experienced vendor leaders state that the first thing they look for in potential leaders is ability. They then define ability as ease when talking with bureaucrats. One woman explains, "We see who has the most capacidad from the base, and we elect them... Los que puedan enfrentar los autoridades, los que saben argumentar/We see who has the most ability, of the members, and we elect them... those that can confront the authorities, those that know how to argue. (T., personal communication, November 18<sup>th</sup>, 2014)."

Alternately, some vendors say that they elect "people who can talk." When asked to clarify, they say those who can speak eloquently and without fear in front of a vendor assembly and who are not afraid to make a case to high-ranking bureaucrats. Occasionally, they add that this is particularly important because so many indigenous women -- the majority of street vendors, according to survey responses -- are terrified to talk in meetings. Thus, we see that the most important quality of a potential leader, from the perspective of vendors and bureaucrats, is the ability to speak easily to authorities. This ability is cultivated over time by people and institutions, and at most turns favors men over women.

All vendors must interact with the bureaucracy, often frequently and repeatedly. Vendors in most cities primarily interact with authorities for two reasons: their activity is not sanctioned or they have an issue with their vending license. In La Paz, the city government has issued over 30,000 vending licenses and most vendors interact with the bureaucracy in the course of filing paperwork to maintain their licenses or resolving issues with their licenses, much of which is annual (Gobierno Autónomo Municipal de La Paz, 2015). Filing annual payment and renewal paperwork is onerous but routine; however, vendors have to make personal cases to bureaucrats for changing the name on a license, changing the location, products or times they vend, or changing the exact size and material of their stalls. Individual vendors almost always accompany an association or federation leader to bureaucratic offices and meetings and make their cases to bureaucrats with these representatives. For men, these become opportunities to parlay into power, while women often find these interactions frightening, discouraging, and degrading.

Men are praised for making strong cases to bureaucrats and for confronting authorities. While women occasionally receive praise for similar stances, vendors also say that women shouldn't be too aggressive. Some characteristics that are typically ascribed to men are ascribed to vendor women in a negative light, as a way to disqualify them from leadership positions. When I asked

one vendor woman why there are so many male vendor leaders, she responded, “Los hombres son sensatos. Las mujeres somos agresivas, peleamos demasiado/The men are sensible. Women, we are aggressive, we fight too much (S., October 31<sup>st</sup>, 2014).”

Female leaders are aware of the double bind this presents and discuss it in part by stating that they should have been born men. For example, Juliana, a young secretaria general, recounted an unrelated conflict to another vendor,

“I am the only one that argues, I should have been born a man, they keep telling me to be quiet but at this point I’ve become the representative of the family... My brothers should be resolving this but they do not speak or understand Aymara and they are calladitos, they don’t argue, no tienen boca. (E.M., December 4<sup>th</sup>, 2014).”

When women take their conflicts or even routine paperwork to bureaucrats, they are much more likely to be condescended to, yelled at, or dismissed. In group meetings with almost invariably male bureaucrats, women present their paperwork through a male vendor leader that the bureaucrat asks to organize the meeting. While these meetings are not pleasant for anyone – they often end in an argument between the facilitator and the bureaucrat – they are particularly hostile for the vendor women that present their cases. When a bureaucrat insults someone, it is invariably a woman, and sexual jokes and innuendos are common. For example, one of the lawyers yelled at a pregnant woman after she presented her case, in front of 30 people: “You had years to regularize this, you should have done it then and, pardon me, but this is ignorance! (L.S., October 15<sup>th</sup>, 2015).”

The main attribute that vendors look for in potential leaders is the ability to confront and work with bureaucrats. Vendors build a reputation for this ability through publicly presenting issues to and successfully managing conflicts with bureaucrats. When bureaucrats silence, dismiss, yell at and insult the petitions of female vendors in front of dozens of others, they sabotage any working relationship that they had with that vendor and cast her as weak, ineffective, or, at best, a victim in the eyes of other vendors. Thus, bureaucrats’ public treatment of women in large meetings often undermines the vendors’ opportunities for building a powerful reputation.

#### *Gender discrimination and successful women*

Still, many women do become vendor leaders and some rise to be representatives in city federations and the national confederation. Who are they and how do they attain this power? The women that succeed appear to be exceptionally good at positioning themselves as interlocutors between divergent sectors. Most speak an indigenous language fluently as well as unaccented, formal Spanish. Additionally, they adopt stereotypically male behaviors to assert themselves in the presence of male higher-ups, but can retreat in a moment to unthreatening stereotypical female behaviors. They are also unflaggingly persistent.

For example, Elena is a smiling grandmother who has worked as a vendor for over 50 years. Her mother founded the association she now leads and as a La Paz native that is fluent in Spanish and Aymara, she is exceptionally talented at gaining the confidence of anyone in the appropriate language, with an ample dusting of diminutive phrases. However, she reinforces her authority in

front of male leaders by engaging in combative exchanges of sexual jokes, where she questions their manhood, gender identity, and sexual ability in crude terms. For example, once when Roberto Rodrigo Quisbert made a suggestive joke to another vendor and called her a chicken, Elena loudly interjected, “Ella va a saltar encima para ponerte huevos!/She will jump on top of you to put eggs [slang for balls] on you!” She is particularly likely to launch into such an attack when a male leader is disparaging or sexually harassing a female vendor, which is a frequent occurrence.

Other women attain respect and power through physical violence. Two older indigenous women that hold positions in the inner circle of the federation have reputations for starting physical fights. One is nicknamed Pacquiao, after the boxer Manny Pacquiao – “Because she fights so much,” explains Santana -- and is occasionally deputized by Santana to organize groups of vendors to intimidate an adversary. Yolanda, a 77 year-old Aymara woman, holds a carefully maintained reputation as an arsonist: multiple people have whispered to me that if you cross her, she will set your stall on fire. These two women and several others frequently make cameos in vendor gossip for the violence they threaten or carry out, and are alternately respected and criticized for being too aggressive. Still, Elena and Yolanda are able to translate their aggressive reputations into clear, confident presentations to bureaucrats, and vendors de base seek them out for advice in approaching bureaucrats. Even so, most of Pacquiao’s influence with Dr. Gomez comes from her renowned abilities as a cook; Dr. Gomez often requests in front of other vendors that she come to his house and cook for his family.

One woman, Belén Barrientos, leads her own federation and has developed a fruitful alliance with the MAS faction of the city council. However, her federation is small; while Santana represents 174 vendor associations and another, nicknamed Cui, represents around 40, Barrientos’s federation consists of only 12 associations. Additionally, she is frequently ridiculed by both bureaucrats and male vendors as a witch, which carries sexual connotations. During a campaign meeting with vendors, the mayor made jokes about her being a witch,

“Que bruja, ¿no? Manilla, Rodriguez, han caído a sus pies. Gomez no ha caído pero atropelló allá. ¿Que encantos tiene esta mujer? Y más un aviso, sobre todo para los varones: si vean a Belén Barrientos, ¡corre en la otra dirección!/What a witch, right? Manilla, Rodriguez, have fallen at her feet. Gomez hasn’t fallen but he tripped over them. What charms does this woman have? And one more warning, especially for the men, if you see Belen Barrientos, run in the other direction! (L.R., February 6<sup>th</sup>, 2015)”

No bureaucrat or politician has ever insulted any other federation leader in my presence. While rank and file vendors occasionally make disparaging remarks about the leaders of other federations – the other two male leaders have the less than flattering nicknames of Hipo (Hiccup) and Cui (Guinea Pig) – the gossip is limited to someone drinking too much or asking members for too much money. Barrientos is the target of similar accusations, but vendors and bureaucrats add personal attacks and sexual jokes.

Echoing findings from sociological research on other professions, female vendor leaders talk about fighting over years to attain their position and stay in it; in contrast, male leaders often

state that they became leaders accidentally or suddenly. When I asked the two top male leaders how they became leaders, they said it was accidental. Jaime Santana references a woman: “It was an accident. There was this girl... (J.P., personal communication, April 6<sup>th</sup>, 2015)” To the same question, Roberto Rodrigo Quisbert said,

“Accidentally. They told my wife and I to come to this meeting and my wife stayed selling while I went. Then they nominated me as the Secretaria de Actas. (J.M., personal communication, March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2015)”

He went on to tell me how the next year he became Secretaria General (head leader) of his association because he could read, write, and speak clearly and informatively. Prominent female leaders can also read, write, and speak assertively, but they had much more difficulty becoming leaders. Virginia, an 88 year-old leader of the national Confederation responded to the same question with,

“I fought for the street. They would come and hit us with hoses then spray us, and I would stay there and not leave. I fought alongside the Secretaria General. Afterwards, they elected me to the directorio, as the standard bearer (L., personal communication, February 26<sup>th</sup>, 2015).”

Like Quisbert, Virginia also worked her way up the leadership ladder, but even after demonstrating more commitment she started in a much lower position and took much longer to become the head of her association. Another prominent female vendor leader stated, “We don’t just go straight to secretaria general, no, we start lower. And you learn and you move up. (V.R., November 18<sup>th</sup>, 2014).” Likewise, Elena is literate and notably more articulate than Quisbert, but also worked much harder to get to her position and will not try for a higher place in the organization,

“We had a problem with the old directorio, so I organized the silpancheras into a majority, and then they elected me as the new secretaria general in the next election... but it is such a headache, being a leader, I will not run for reelection next year (L., personal communication, March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2015).”

Thus, men report floating into power, while women intentionally fight for it and must continue fighting once elected. This process publicly plays out in the *ampliados*, where 80-100 local leaders regularly come together. In the meetings, any elected leader can speak and offer an opinion on a subject. Women do speak up, but men appear to benefit more from taking these positions. In December 2014, the vendors had an opportunity to select a male and a female vendor – in accordance with the law mandating gender parity in candidates -- to run for city council on the mayor’s ticket. The three women who were nominated were veteran leaders with decades of experience, well-known younger women were not nominated. The woman that took the candidacy was then placed second to the male candidate. In contrast, one of the men that was nominated was a young man nominated solely on a single speech that he made to the *ampliado* that day – he was so unknown that the person nominating him had to ask his name three times, yet he still came within a few votes of becoming the federation’s candidate.

Successful female leaders exist, but their positions are more precarious than their male counterparts. It is harder for them to build the personal relationships with bureaucrats that make their male counterparts valuable to their organizations, and they are much more frequently questioned and ridiculed, openly and in gossip, for aggressive behavior and speech that is praised in male leaders. These contradictions take their toll, and female leaders are more likely than male leaders to burnout, turn down nominations to positions of power, and not seek reelection.

Bureaucrats' discriminatory treatment of vendors and preferences to work with men is an important part of who becomes a vendor leader, but it is not the only factor. Bureaucratic preferences exacerbate the preferential treatment that men receive compared to women in Bolivia and most other countries. Men are encouraged to speak up in public settings large and small, while women are actively discouraged. Men are encouraged by their families to finish high school and pursue a professional degree, which can give them credentials similar or equal to the bureaucrats they later address. On the other hand, parents are more likely to require girls to start working in addition to or instead of finishing high school and several vendors report that once married, their husbands require them to finish vending, housework, and childcare before doing anything related to their own education. Thus, bureaucrats' influence on who becomes a vendor leader does not exist in a vacuum; I suggest that it compounds the widespread gender discrimination documented in other research.

## **Conclusion**

A small group of younger women consistently show up at the federation offices, follow Santana to the Unidad meetings, and attend the *ampliados*, even if they are not current leaders. Unlike many of the older women, they have graduated high school and attended university; one to study law. They acknowledge widespread gender discrimination but also the opportunities that they have had that their mothers did not – and the opportunities that they have worked for while their brothers have stood by.

Bolivia is changing and this group of women demonstrates the possibilities of those changes: they began working as children but are now enrolled in universities, they know their formal rights as workers and as members of vendor organizations, and they speak Aymara with their mothers and formal Spanish with politicians. They are hardworking, intelligent people who learn their rights so that they cannot be manipulated by more powerful leaders and bureaucrats. Within this group of women, one sees that educational and economic reforms have had concrete impacts on working people's lives.

Perhaps these reforms and gender equality policies will continue to change the opportunities available to women and create less sexist men. It is possible that vendor associations will increasingly consist of educated women that elect people like them to lead and demand that their leaders follow association statutes that check power. Maybe more feminist and anti-racist candidates will be qualified to enter the bureaucracy and will actually be hired. The central argument of the paper is that bureaucratic preferences shape who can become and stay a leader in civil society, which implies that if people with a wider range of preferences become bureaucrats, an increasingly diverse group of people can attain leadership positions in civil society.

However, the previously-mentioned group of young vendor women does not have an equivalent group of young vendor men or bureaucrats. Men continue to glide to positions of power within vendor organizations, often with little actual experience as working vendors. Once in positions of power, they, like the older male leaders, gain reputations as *mujerigos* (womanizers) and make sexual jokes and passes at the young women that come to them for help. While women are changing how they engage with power and bureaucracy, the men are not. The farthest-reaching gender equality policies are unlikely to change much if the day to day power dynamics between men and women do not change.

In the meantime, higher-level bureaucrats tend to be men, and as demonstrated in this study, are more likely to establish working and social relationships with other men, not only in the bureaucracy but also in civil society organizations. Male managers hire male professional staff, and more readily relate to and help male leaders in the civil society organizations that they work with. When they do establish relationships with women leaders from the same civil society organizations, they are more likely to make unreasonable demands that these women perform time-consuming but underrewarded tasks, like preparing food for a bureaucrat's political event. These actions compound the barriers that women already face to attaining and maintaining power within their organizations and undermine the quality of representation, even in majority-female sectors like street vending.

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