



SOCIAL PROTESTS IN THE URBAN DEVELOPMENT OF THE CITY OF PUNO

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ABSTRACT

The research analyses the impact of social protests in Puno, Peru, focusing on the perceptions of residents and authorities. This phenomenon, driven by political, economic, and social factors, affects commerce, transport, and citizen security. Through interviews and focus groups, four categories of impact were identified: urban development, commerce, transport, and security. Some view protests as tools for advocacy, while others perceive them as causes of chaos. In commerce, there is a decline in sales and changes in consumption patterns. In transport, protests cause disruptions and the need for alternatives. Citizen security is affected by an increased perception of insecurity and instances of violence. Additionally, criticisms of the response by law enforcement highlight the excessive use of force. The results reflect the complexity of the experiences related to protests in Puno.

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1. Introduction

Social protests are collective manifestations present in the history of cities both globally and locally. Puno, a city situated in the Andean highlands, experiences periodic episodes of social unrest due to the social and economic inequalities it faces (Durand, 2023). These expressions of discontent not only reflect underlying tensions within society but also act as catalysts for change, directly impacting urban development and the configuration of public spaces (United Nations, 2023). In the case of Puno, a region renowned for its rich tradition of activism and social mobilisation, protests have had a particularly significant impact. The historically and culturally diverse population of Puno has used protests as a tool to voice demands related to territorial rights, social justice, and economic policies, leaving profound marks on the city's urban fabric (Suárez, 2023).

The impact of these manifestations extends beyond the visible, such as damage to infrastructure or disruptions to economic activity; it also deeply affects the perceptions and social dynamics of residents, shaping collective identity and redefining relationships between citizens and local authorities (Pajuelo, 2009). Protests in Puno, as in many other cities, result in the reconfiguration of urban spaces, the redefinition of urban planning priorities, and, at times, the strengthening or weakening of the social fabric.

This research explores and analyses how these manifestations have affected the city's development, not only in terms of infrastructure and economy but also regarding the perceptions of its inhabitants. Through a qualitative approach, including in-depth interviews and focus groups, this study seeks to understand the experiences and opinions of residents and local authorities. The application of these methods contributes to understanding how protests have influenced daily life in Puno, from the transformation of its public spaces to the evolution of its economic and social structure. Ultimately, this study provides a comprehensive overview of the phenomenon of protests in Puno and their impact on the urban fabric.

2. Objectives and Methodology

The primary objective of this study is to understand the impact of social protests on the urban development of the city of Puno, adopting a qualitative perspective to capture the experiences, perceptions, and lived realities of both residents and local authorities. One of the initial aims is to investigate how residents and decision-makers perceive and experience the effects of protests on the structure and daily functioning of the city. This analysis seeks not only to identify the predominant concerns and opinions but also to delve into the individual and collective narratives that emerge in contexts of social mobilisation.

Secondly, the study aims to explore the impact of protests on urban commerce. Protests disrupt the economic life of a city, affecting both small-scale traders and medium-sized enterprises. Through interviews and the collection of testimonies, the study seeks to understand the economic dynamics during these events, aiming to explain the adaptation strategies of those involved and the long-term consequences for commercial activity. Additionally, the perceptions of citizens and transport workers regarding the effects of protests on urban mobility are examined. The disruption of public and private transport is one of the most visible impacts during social protests, causing inconvenience and challenges for mobility. In this regard, the study seeks to understand how these temporary changes affect perceptions of safety and accessibility within the city.

Finally, the study explores the perception of the impact on citizen security, a necessary understanding in contexts of social unrest. It aims to reveal how individuals experience these moments of tension and what their concerns and fears are regarding personal and collective safety. In summary, the objectives set out aim not only to describe the impacts of protests but also to understand the meanings and emotions associated with these events in the urban life of the city of Puno.

This qualitative study, exploratory and descriptive-interpretative in nature, enables a deeper understanding of the perceptions and opinions of residents and local authorities regarding the

impact of protests in Puno, focusing on the participants' experiences and perceptions of this phenomenon. To obtain detailed data, in-depth interviews were conducted with residents, traders, public transport drivers, and local authorities, complemented by focus groups to gather diverse perspectives. The instruments used included open-ended interview guides, a field notebook for recording observations, and audio and video recorders to document the interviews and group discussions.

3. Results

The study conducted on the impact of social protests on the urban development of the city of Puno reveals a range of multidimensional perceptions and effects that reflect the complexity of these manifestations within the urban context.

3.1. Residents' Perceptions

The analysis of residents' perceptions in Puno reveals a broad spectrum of opinions regarding social protests. On one hand, a significant portion of the population views these manifestations as a vital tool for advocating rights and improving socio-economic conditions. This group of residents feels empowered by their active participation in political life, perceiving protests as a legitimate and necessary means to influence political decisions affecting the city. This perspective is evident in the testimony of informant 03.

Based on the interviewee's statements, it is clear that residents' perceptions of protests are complex. While they acknowledge the legitimacy of social demands and many support the mobilisations, they also highlight the difficulties and costs they face in their daily lives. In particular, those living in central areas of the city express concern about the increasing radicalisation of protests, which not only affects the accessibility of main roads but also creates an atmosphere of fear and latent violence. This climate of instability negatively impacts economic and social activities, as both public and private institutions halt their operations. Furthermore, residents underscore the emotional and sensory impact caused by constant exposure to noise and chaos, which even invades the intimate space of their homes, heightening feelings of vulnerability and emotional exhaustion.

The protests are legitimate, but the government doesn't listen, so the protesters take more radical measures (...) they shout louder and attack onlookers (...) the city's main roads become impassable, no establishment, whether public or private, operates along the protesters' route due to fear of aggression and looting (...) the noise is unbearable even inside our homes. I agree with the protests, I know we must continue, but the cost we pay, those of us living in the central part of the city, is very high. (Informant 3, personal communication, June 15, 2023)

In summary, the city's residents perceive protests negatively. For them, these manifestations are synonymous with chaos and disorder, affecting daily life and causing deterioration in urban infrastructure. These individuals consider protests to be a hindrance to the city's development, particularly in terms of modernisation and the improvement of public services. This duality in perceptions highlights the polarisation within the community regarding the role of protests in the urban transformation of Puno.

Figure 1 Protests in Puno - January 2023



Source: National University of the Altiplano Archive. (2023, January 5). [Photograph] - City paralyzed.

3.2. Local Authorities' Opinion

The opinions of local authorities regarding protests are also divided. On the one hand, some officials recognise the importance of these manifestations as a mechanism to express legitimate demands and promote necessary changes in local policy. These authorities view protests as an expression of democratic dynamism and a catalyst for implementing more inclusive and equitable policies.

In the interview, the local authority expresses a balanced stance towards social protests, acknowledging both the legitimacy of the demands and the need to maintain order in the city. From their perspective, while protesters have the right to express themselves, the consequences of mobilisations often have a negative impact on key sectors such as commerce and transport. The paralysis of these activities not only causes economic losses but also compromises the safety and well-being of the general population. The authority emphasises the difficulty of managing these situations, as the main challenge lies in finding a balance between guaranteeing the rights of protesters and protecting the interests of those affected by the protest mobilisations. In this context, the importance of promoting dialogue as a tool for conflict resolution is highlighted, avoiding repression and seeking solutions that do not paralyse urban life.

From my experience as an authority in Puno, social protests are a delicate issue. On the one hand, I understand that people have every right to express their discontent, and in many cases, those demands are just and need to be heard. However, when protests intensify and affect the daily life of the city, such as commerce, transport, and security, the situation becomes complicated (...) Protests paralyse key sectors of the local economy, causing significant losses for small and medium-sized traders (...) when the main roads are blocked, it not only affects citizens' mobility but also puts public safety and order at risk. As an authority, one has to find a balance. It is not about repressing protests but about seeking channels for dialogue that allow conflicts to be resolved without the entire city being affected (...) it is a constant challenge because each protest is different, but our goal must

always be to protect the rights of everyone, both the protesters and those affected by the manifestations. Testimony. (Informant 1, personal communication, May 25, 2023)

From the perspective of the authorities, protests are a destabilising factor that compromises governance and hinders the implementation of urban projects. From this viewpoint, manifestations are seen as an obstacle to the efficient management of the city, particularly in terms of planning and infrastructure development. This dichotomy among authorities reflects the inherent tensions in managing a city that faces ongoing social challenges.

3.3 Impact on Urban Commerce

The impact of protests on urban commerce in Puno has been significant, particularly with regard to the effect on local businesses. During periods of protest, traders have reported a substantial decrease in sales, attributed to reduced customer footfall and temporary business closures. This situation has led to a shift in consumption patterns, with a tendency towards the precautionary purchase of essential goods and a marked reduction in the acquisition of non-essential items. The impact on commerce is evident from the interviews conducted with informants.

The interview reveals the severe economic impact that social protests have had on the city of Puno. According to the interviewee, the paralysis of commercial activities during protest hours, which occupy a significant portion of the day, has forced businesses to close their doors, directly affecting their ability to retain staff. Staff reductions have become an inevitable measure, impacting not only business owners but also workers who depend on these jobs. Estimated economic losses are alarming, reaching approximately 450 million soles per day, according to data from the Chamber of Commerce. This figure illustrates the magnitude of the damage caused by protests to the local economy, further complicating the situation in an already vulnerable region.

Social protests against this government have paralysed nearly the entire Puno region. In the specific case of our city, a large part of commercial activities has been blocked, especially during protest hours, which take up much of the day (...) with commercial premises closed, it is impossible to maintain regular staff payrolls, leading to staff reductions (...) estimates suggest that economic losses in Puno amount to around 450 million soles per day, according to the Chamber of Commerce directors. Testimony. (Informant 2, personal communication, June 12, 2023)

Despite these challenges, traders have developed adaptation strategies to mitigate losses. These strategies include reducing or changing operating hours, increasing security measures, and utilising online sales platforms. These adaptation mechanisms have enabled traders to maintain a degree of stability in their operations, albeit with reduced profit margins.

3.4. Impact on Urban Transport

Protests have also had a significant impact on the urban transport system in Puno. Public transport services have experienced frequent disruptions, with route diversions and significant delays in travel times. Both drivers and users have expressed frustration over these difficulties, which hinder access to essential services and affect the overall mobility of the city. The impact on transport is evident in the accounts of the interviewees.

In the interview, a transport worker describes the challenging situation they face during social protests in Puno. The blocking of streets and routes not only completely halts their work but also generates economic uncertainty by reducing their daily income. The pressure to meet schedules and deal with passengers' frustration—while passengers may understand the reasons for the protests, they are also affected by delays and the inability to reach their destinations—adds further tension. Additionally, the extra costs for fuel and repairs due to diversions and alternative routes increase operational expenses, further impacting transport workers. Despite these challenges, the interviewee shows understanding towards the protests, acknowledging that they are sometimes the only means for the population to express their discontent and be heard.

Social protests always put us in a difficult situation. When streets are closed and routes are blocked, our work comes to a complete standstill. This means less income to take home and more worry about meeting schedules (...) we often have to face the frustration of passengers who, while they understand the reasons for the protests, are also affected by not being able to reach their destinations. The city becomes chaotic, and the additional costs for fuel and repairs due to diversions and alternative routes hit us hard. However, we also understand that these demonstrations are sometimes the only way people can make themselves heard. (Informant 6, personal communication, June 22, 2023)

In response to transport issues, residents have adopted alternative solutions, such as using bicycles, walking, or relying on informal taxis. However, these alternatives are not always sufficient to meet the population's mobility needs. Furthermore, there has been an increase in criticism towards the authorities for the lack of planning and effective response to maintain the operability of urban transport during protests. This situation highlights a significant gap in transport management in contexts of high social conflict.

3.5. Impact on Citizen Security

Finally, citizen security has also been affected by social protests in Puno. Both residents and traders have reported an increased perception of insecurity during demonstrations, fearing looting, vandalism, and violent confrontations. This climate of insecurity has generated greater tension among the population, affecting social coexistence and stability in the city. This information is reflected in the testimonies of the informants.

The interview highlights the ambivalence that many residents feel towards social protests in Puno. On the one hand, the interviewee acknowledges the importance of demonstrations as a legitimate means of advocating for rights and necessary improvements for the community. However, they also describe the chaos caused by blockades in the city, significantly impacting daily life: the inability to go to work, the suspension of classes, and the difficulty in carrying out routine activities such as shopping. This paralysis generates deep frustration among citizens. Despite this, the interviewee shows understanding towards the cause, noting that without protests, many issues would remain unresolved, illustrating the internal conflict between supporting the demands and desiring a return to normalcy in the city.

I regard the protests with mixed feelings (...) I understand that they are a way to fight for rights and improvements we need, but when demonstrations intensify and the streets are filled with blockades, everything becomes complicated (...) you can't go to work, children can't go to school, and you can't even go shopping (...) the city feels paralysed, and that generates frustration. However, I also know that if we don't raise our voices, many problems would remain unresolved (...) it's difficult because, although we support the cause, we also want life in the city to return to normal. (Informant 5, personal communication, June 20, 2023)

Furthermore, incidents of violence and vandalism have been documented, causing damage to both public and private property. The response of law enforcement has been a subject of debate, with divided opinions between those who support strict measures to maintain order and those who criticise the excessive use of force and violations of human rights. In the case of Puno, this has involved the presence of military personnel who, alongside the police, attempted to suppress protests, even using military weapons and firing on civilians. These events highlight the delicate relationship between security and civil rights in the context of social protests.

Figure 2 Paralysed City - January 2023



Source: National University of the Altiplano Archive. (2023, January 9). [Photograph] - Trade and transport are paralyzed.

In summary, the study's results demonstrate how social protests in Puno have had a profound and complex impact on various aspects of urbanism, ranging from the perceptions of residents and authorities to commerce, transport, and citizen security. This analysis underscores the need for a comprehensive and balanced approach to managing demonstrations in the urban context, ensuring both the right to protest and the sustained development of the city.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

The analysis of the results obtained in this study on the impact of social protests on the urban development of the city of Puno reveals a series of complex and multifaceted dynamics that must be understood from a comprehensive perspective. Firstly, the divergent perceptions of residents and local authorities reflect an underlying tension between the need for social change and the desire for stability and urban development. On one hand, those who view protests positively see them as a necessary means to drive socio-economic and political transformations (Calle, 2007). These perceptions align with theories that highlight the importance of citizen participation and social mobilisation as drivers of change in societies with structural inequalities.

However, the negative perception held by other segments of the population underscores the immediate costs that protests impose on daily life and urban development (Lanza, 2019). This group of residents, perceiving protests as chaotic and problematic, highlights the limitations of traditional governance approaches that fail to effectively address the needs and demands of the citizenry. The tensions between these differing perceptions suggest the need for more inclusive policies that recognise both the right to protest and the importance of maintaining urban functionality.

Regarding the impact on urban commerce, the results show how protests can generate adverse effects on the local economy, significantly affecting small and medium-sized traders. The decline in sales and the need to adapt business models reveal the vulnerability of the commercial sector in situations of social instability. Despite the adaptation strategies implemented by traders, the reduction in profit margins and widespread uncertainty suggest that the resilience of local commerce is limited in contexts of high social conflict. This raises questions about the economic sustainability in scenarios of prolonged protests and the need to develop more effective support mechanisms for the sector (Peruvian Institute of Economics, 2023).

The impact on urban transport, on the other hand, highlights the fragility of Puno's mobility infrastructure during protest events. Interruptions and diversions in transport services not only affect population mobility but also impact productivity and access to essential services (Ombudsman's Office, 2023). The adoption of alternative solutions by residents, such as using bicycles or informal taxis, demonstrates individual adaptability but also underscores deficiencies in the planning and management of transport by authorities. This aspect highlights the need to improve the response capacity of the urban transport system by incorporating effective contingency plans to ensure operability during crises.

In terms of citizen security, the results indicate an increased perception of insecurity during protests, accompanied by incidents of violence and vandalism. This phenomenon underscores the challenges of ensuring security in the context of mass social mobilisation, where the line between peaceful protest and violent acts can become blurred. The polarisation in opinions regarding the actions of law enforcement reflects tensions between the need to maintain public order and respect for human rights (Álvarez, 2014). This dual perception underscores the complexity of managing security in protest contexts, where control strategies must be balanced with respect for civil liberties.

Expanding the discussion on the impact of social protests on the urban development of Puno, it is necessary to recognise that a city is not defined solely by its physical structures, inhabitants, housing, or transport systems (Sivoli, 2011). Cities are complex environments shaped by multiple interconnected dimensions, including cultural, economic, symbolic, and political factors. From this perspective, the city must be understood as a living, constantly evolving system, where individual and collective actions and decisions profoundly impact its dynamics and development (Rojas, 2023).

In this sense, social protests not only affect commerce, transport, and security, as noted, but also transform the city's symbolic spaces. Squares, streets, and meeting points become stages for resistance and change, reshaping how citizens interact with their environment. Thus, protests imbue these spaces with new meanings, transitioning from merely functional to embodying the struggle for rights, justice, and a better quality of life. This process highlights the role of the city not only as a collection of physical structures but also as a space where power relations and social dynamics are negotiated and redefined (Harvey, 2012).

The city also serves as a reflection of the collective identities of its inhabitants, and during times of protest, these identities are tested and come into conflict. Mobilisations respond not only to immediate demands but also open spaces for reflection on the kind of city citizens wish to build (Peruvian Institute of Economics, 2023). In Puno, this phenomenon is evident in the divergent perceptions between sectors that support protests as a means of transformation and those that view them as a threat to the established order and urban development. These differing perceptions reinforce the idea that the city is a space of constant contestation, where visions of progress and social justice are in tension (Bustinza et al., 2024).

Moreover, the impact of protests on the city cannot be separated from the long-term effects they generate on the social fabric. Interruptions in daily life, tensions in relationships between different social groups, and the perception of insecurity not only affect the city's immediate functionality (Insurgentes University, 2023) but also have repercussions on collective trust and social cohesion. In this context, the city's resilience is not limited to its physical infrastructure, such as transport or commerce, but also encompasses the capacity of citizens to adapt, reorganise, and maintain the social fabric during crises. This underscores the importance of designing urban policies that not only address infrastructure demands but also promote dialogue, inclusion, and social cohesion (Beijing Action, 2024).

Ultimately, the analysis of the impact of social protests in Puno must stem from a comprehensive view of the city as a dynamic space where physical and social structures interact in complex ways. Protests, far from being an isolated phenomenon, are an integral part of urban life and, as such, require management that acknowledges their transformative nature. From an urban governance perspective, it is essential to develop strategies that not only mitigate the

immediate negative effects of protests but also foster more equitable and sustainable urban development in the long term.

Collectively, the discussion of these results highlights the need for a more holistic approach to addressing social protests in Puno's urban environment. It is imperative that both authorities and citizens recognise and address the multidimensional impacts of demonstrations, ensuring that short-term responses do not compromise long-term sustainable urban development.

The discussion thus far allows for the precise articulation of the conclusions reached. This study has provided a deep understanding of the various dimensions of the impact of social protests on the urban development of Puno, addressing key aspects such as the perceptions of residents and local authorities, as well as the effects of demonstrations on urban commerce, transport, and citizen security.

The perceptions of residents and local authorities regarding the impact of protests on the city's development are deeply divided. On one hand, a significant portion of the population and some authorities value protests as a legitimate means to advocate for rights and catalyse political change. However, another segment of the community perceives these manifestations as an obstacle to urban development, highlighting their negative effects on daily life and the city's infrastructure. This finding underscores the need for urban policies that balance the promotion of the right to protest with the maintenance of urban stability and functionality.

Protests have had a notably adverse impact on urban commerce in Puno. Local businesses have experienced a significant decline in sales during periods of demonstrations, forcing traders to adopt various adaptation strategies, such as reducing operating hours and transitioning to online sales platforms. However, these measures have been insufficient to fully counteract economic losses, revealing the vulnerability of the commercial sector to social instability. Therefore, it is necessary to consider the development of economic support mechanisms to strengthen the resilience of local traders.

Interruptions in urban transport caused by protests have significantly affected mobility in Puno. Both drivers and public transport users have experienced paralysis and delays, forcing the population to seek alternatives such as bicycles or informal taxis. This phenomenon highlights the need to improve urban transport planning by incorporating contingency plans to ensure the continuity of essential services during periods of protest.

Citizen security has been one of the most affected areas during protests, with an increased perception of insecurity among Puno's residents and traders. Documented incidents of violence and vandalism during demonstrations have generated a climate of fear and distrust towards law enforcement. This finding suggests the need to review and strengthen public security strategies, ensuring a balance between maintaining order and respecting human rights.

A significant finding of this study is the adaptability and resilience demonstrated by Puno's traders and residents in the face of the negative effects of protests. Despite disruptions in commerce and transport and the increased perception of insecurity, the population has found ways to adjust their daily and commercial activities, indicating a strong capacity to withstand adversity. This aspect highlights the importance of fostering and supporting these resilience capacities, both at the individual and collective levels, as an integral part of sustainable urban development in Puno.

Integrating the conclusions, it is clear that this study has demonstrated that the city of Puno, like any other urban space, is not merely a sum of physical structures, housing, vehicles, and people. The city is a dynamic entity where multiple dimensions converge. It is a stage for social interactions, a territory of symbolic disputes, and a space for the collective construction of the future. Social protests, far from being isolated events, are an expression of this inherent complexity, reflecting both the tensions and aspirations of a community seeking change.

The demonstrations in Puno not only disrupt commerce, transport, or citizen security but also reshape the meaning of urban spaces and the relationships among inhabitants. In this context, the city becomes a reflection of social conflicts and transformations. Squares and streets, beyond their utilitarian function, transform into symbols of struggle and resistance, redefining the public space.

As the city faces these challenges, the response cannot be limited to immediate or partial solutions. The results obtained highlight the need for a broader approach that not only addresses the economic and logistical effects of protests but also promotes reflection on the kind of city that is desired. Sustainable urban development necessarily involves recognising the city as a living space where political, economic, and social decisions must integrate citizens' aspirations and the need to ensure a balance between rights and order.

Ultimately, the adaptability and resilience demonstrated by Puno's residents and traders during demonstrations are a testament to the transformative power of society in facing urban challenges. Fostering and strengthening this resilience, both socially and urbanly, is an essential step to ensure that the city not only survives crises but also strengthens and evolves towards a more inclusive and sustainable future.

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