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ABSTRACT

This article aims to analyze the female presence within the political landscape of Pernambuco, utilizing Indicator 5.5.1 of the 2030 Agenda (which measures the proportion of seats held by women in local parliaments and governments) and the Gender Parity Index (GPI). Specifically, it examines indicators of female participation in local governments and investigates the effectiveness of party quota policies. The methodology adopted was quantitative and descriptive, employing secondary data from the TSE, TRE-PE, and IPEA, and utilizing the Gender Parity Index calculation to evaluate parity in the 2024 municipal elections. The results demonstrate a low percentage of female victories, with women occupying only 16.30% of mayoral positions and 16.21% of city council seats in Pernambuco, classifying the GPI as "very poor." It was found that although the quota policy increased the number of candidacies (35.30% for city council), this progress did not result in proportional electoral success. The study concludes that Pernambuco has failed to meet Indicator 5.5.1 of SDG 5 regarding its political scenario, necessitating the improvement of quotas and oversight mechanisms to achieve a more inclusive democracy.

Keywords: Female political representation. Gender equality. Women's empowerment. Pernambuco politics. SDG 5.

RESUMO

Este artigo teve como objetivo analisar a presença feminina no cenário político pernambucano, utilizando o indicador 5.5.1 da Agenda 2030 (que mede a proporção de assentos ocupados por mulheres em parlamentos e governos locais) e o Índice de Paridade de Gênero (IPG). Especificamente, busca-se examinar os indicadores de participação feminina nos governos locais e investigar a efetividade das políticas de cotas partidárias. A metodologia adotada foi quantitativa e de caráter descritivo, empregando dados secundários do TSE, TRE-PE e IPEA, e utilizando o cálculo do Índice de Paridade de Gênero para avaliar a paridade nas eleições municipais de 2024. Os resultados demonstram um baixo percentual de vitórias femininas, com apenas 16,30% dos cargos de prefeita e 16,21% das cadeiras de vereadora, em Pernambuco, foram ocupados por mulheres, classificando o IPG como "muito ruim". Constatou-se que, apesar da política de cotas ter aumentado o número de candidaturas (35,30% para vereadoras), o avanço não resultou em conquistas proporcionais de mandatos. Conclui-se que Pernambuco não cumpriu o indicador 5.5.1 da ODS 5, relativo ao seu cenário político, exigindo o aperfeiçoamento das cotas e mecanismos de fiscalização para uma democracia mais inclusiva.

Palavras-chave: Representação política feminina. Igualdade de gênero. Empoderamento feminino. Política pernambucana. ODS 5.

INTRODUCTION

Women's participation in Brazilian politics is the result of a historical process marked by exclusion. Women gained the right to vote only in 1934, and although they have had formal access to the political landscape for more than nine decades, they remain underrepresented. This inequality may directly affect the making and effectiveness of public policies aimed at the guaranteeing of women's rights (Marques, 2019).

According to the 2022 Demographic Census conducted by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), women account for 51.5% of the Brazilian population - approximately six million more than men. Furthermore, data from the Superior Electoral Court (TSE) indicate that, in 2024, they represented 52.4% of the national electorate. Despite this, women's political representation remains limited: Brazil has one of the lowest levels of female representation in the national legislature among G20 countries (14.81%), whereas Argentina, for example, exceeds 40% (IBGE, 2024).

This issue is directly related to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, established by the United Nations (UN), which seeks to achieve gender equality and women empowerment. More specifically, Target 5.5 aims to "ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life." In the Brazilian context, the Institute for Applied Economic

Research (IPEA) proposes two indicators to assess progress toward this target. Among them, Indicator 5.5.1 measures the proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments and local government.

In addition to committing to the 2030 Agenda, Law No. 9,504/97 (BRASIL, 1997) establishes a minimum quota of 30% for each gender among proportional election candidates. However, this measure should not be limited to ensuring women's presence on electoral ballots; it needs to translate into a real achievement of electing women and lead them to occupy leadership positions. According to the "Women in Politics: 2025" map, Brazil ranks 133rd among the countries with the highest female parliamentary representation. Furthermore, women currently occupy 18.1% of the seats in the Chamber of Deputies and 19.8% of the seats in the Federal Senate. Consequently, women's average representation in the Brazilian National Congress stands at 18.35%, remaining below both the global average (27.2%) and the regional average (35.4%) (UN, 2025).

This discrepancy between the number of women running for office and those actually elected highlights the persistence of structural, partisan, and cultural barriers that hinder women's political advancement. Therefore, it is essential to examine the degree of proportionality between female candidates and those effectively elected across different levels of government: federal, state, and municipal.

According to the Regional Electoral Court (TRE), women constitute the majority of registered voters in 94% of Pernambuco's municipalities. In light of this context, and in order to assess whether Pernambuco has advanced toward fulfilling Target 5.5 of SDG 5, this study addresses the following question: To what extent does women's representation in parliament and local governments in Pernambuco reflect compliance with SDG Indicator 5.5.1?

The general objective of this study is to analyze women's political representation in the state of Pernambuco through Indicator 5.5.1 of Target 5.5 of the 2030 Agenda. More specifically, the study seeks to examine indicators of women's participation in local governments across Pernambuco and to investigate the effectiveness of political party gender quota policies implemented in the legislative branch.

This research is justified by the need to understand whether the state of Pernambuco has made progress in promoting women's political inclusion and to identify existing gaps in this process. By examining the specific reality of Pernambuco, the study maps disparities among its Intermediate Geographic Regions (IGRs) and Immediate Geographic Regions (ImGRs).

In this sense, this study is grounded in the perspective of regional development by approaching gender equality not in isolation, but rather as a structural and territorially differentiated component of the development process. Female underrepresentation therefore constitutes both a democratic deficit and an obstacle to regional development, with asymmetries varying across the state's subregions.

By decentralizing the analysis of Indicator 5.5.1 of the 2030 Agenda, this article extends an assessment that is traditionally conducted at the national level to the regional and municipal contexts of Pernambuco. Furthermore, through the innovative application of the Gender Parity Index (GPI) and a symmetric inequality classification, the study evaluates municipal electoral outcomes as a means of operationalizing the monitoring of SDG 5 at the local level, based on considerably recent data from the 2024 municipal elections. This approach provides an up-to-date assessment of Pernambuco's political landscape, contributing to the academic debate on women's political representation, while also encouraging broader social reflections in favor of a more inclusive and equitable democracy.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND GENDER EQUALITY

The concept of sustainable development (SD), consolidated through the Brundtland Report, is traditionally defined as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1991). Although initially centered on the environmental dimension, the concept has progressively expanded to incorporate social, economic, and political dimensions, thereby recognizing the interdependence between economic growth, social justice, and environmental protection (Dias, 2017; Barbieri, 2020).

As this conceptual expansion unfolded, gender equality came to occupy a central position in the debate on sustainable development, evolving from a sector-specific agenda into a structural component of development itself. This shift stems from the recognition that gender inequalities not only reflect social injustices but also constrain societies' development potential by restricting women's access to resources, opportunities, and decision-making spaces (Amaral; Peixoto, 2021).

The institutionalization of this agenda at the international level can be observed through milestones such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing. Subsequently, the issue was incorporated into the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and, more comprehensively, into the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in which gender equality is established both as a standalone goal (SDG 5) and as a cross-cutting principle (Amaral; Peixoto, 2021).

Within the framework of the 2030 Agenda, gender equality is understood not merely as the guarantee of formal rights, but as the promotion of substantive conditions of equity, including women's access to positions of political and economic power (Barbieri, 2020). In this regard, women's empowerment is directly associated with strengthening women's agency, enabling them to influence decisions that affect both their own lives and the development of their communities (Gupta, 2024).

Among the established goals, Target 5.5 seeks to ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making. Monitoring this target through indicators such as the proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments and local governments, demonstrates that women's underrepresentation remains one of the principal barriers to achieving sustainable development, particularly in contexts characterized by structural inequalities, such as it happens in Brazil (IPEA, 2019).

Thus, promoting gender equality, particularly in the political sphere, should not be understood merely as a normative demand, but rather as an indispensable condition for strengthening democracy and advancing a genuinely inclusive and sustainable model of development (Marques; Pompeu, 2022).

GENDER INEQUALITIES IN THE LABOR MARKET

The analysis of gender inequalities requires recognizing that differences between men and women are socially constructed and historically produced. In this regard, Beauvoir (2024) argues that women's social condition does not arise from biological determinants but from social processes that assign roles, expectations, and limitations to women. This social construction of gender forms the basis of power relations that produce inequalities across different spheres, including the labor market and politics.

These inequalities are manifested through the gender-based division of labor, which establishes a hierarchy between productive activities, associated with men and socially valued, and reproductive activities, historically assigned to women and frequently rendered invisible (Cirino, 2021). This division not only limits women's access to occupations with greater prestige and remuneration but also contributes to the naturalization of gender inequality (Biroli, 2018).

Although women's integration into the labor market represents an important step toward women's emancipation (Beauvoir, 2024), authors such as Hooks (2023) argue that paid employment alone does not guarantee women's independence. In contexts characterized by precarious employment and low wages, paid work may reproduce relations of exploitation, particularly for working-class women. Thus, economic autonomy depends not only on labor market integration but also on the conditions under which such integration occurs.

Moreover, women's participation in paid employment has been accompanied by structural barriers, such as the continued responsibility for domestic and caregiving tasks, resulting in the accumulation of multiple workloads. This phenomenon intensifies women's burden and highlights the persistence of structural inequalities, further aggravated by the inadequacy of public policies to support women, particularly in the context of the care crisis (Cirino, 2021; Biroli, 2018).

This dynamic becomes even more complex when examined from an intersectional perspective. As Akotirene (2019) argues, gender inequalities intersect with social markers such as race and class, producing differentiated experiences of oppression. Therefore, Black women and women from less privileged socioeconomic backgrounds face additional barriers, both in the labor market and in access to political opportunities.

Another relevant factor concerns the impacts of motherhood, often associated with reduced female productivity in the social imaginary, which limits opportunities for career advancement and reinforces gender inequalities. These factors contribute to the persistence of the so-called “glass ceiling”, understood as a set of invisible barriers that hinder women’s advancement to leadership positions regardless of their qualifications (Vaz, 2021).

It is important to emphasize that these labor market inequalities are not confined to the economic sphere but also have direct implications for women’s political participation. The limitation on financial resources, time availability, and support networks undermine women’s ability to enter and remain in political careers, demonstrating the interdependence between economic and political inequalities (Marques; Pompeu, 2022).

From this perspective, women’s empowerment should be understood as a multidimensional process involving not only economic autonomy but also the expansion of women’s participation in decision-making spaces and the transformation of the social structures that reproduce inequality (Gupta, 2024). Therefore, overcoming gender inequalities in the labor market constitutes a fundamental condition for promoting more equitable political participation.

WOMEN’S PARTICIPATION AND REPRESENTATION IN POLITICS

Women’s participation in politics is intrinsically linked to the historical construction of democracies, which, in their origins, excluded women from full citizenship. Although the principle of equality has become one of the cornerstones of democratic regimes, its application was initially restricted, reflecting patriarchal social structures that restricted women’s participation in the public sphere (Marques, 2019).

Within this context, the distinction between descriptive representation and substantive representation, established by Pitkin (1967), is essential to understand the relationship between women’s presence in legislative bodies and political effectiveness. Descriptive representation refers to the correspondence between the sociodemographic characteristics of representatives and those they represent, as when women occupy legislative seats in equivalent proportion to their share of the population, based on the assumption that such proximity facilitates the identification of shared

interests. Substantive representation, in contrast, concerns the effective advocacy of a particular social group's interests by representatives, regardless of whether they share similar characteristics.

Although women's right to vote represented a fundamental milestone in the expansion of women's political inclusion, it did not automatically translate into substantive equality in political participation, as structural, cultural, and institutional barriers continue to restrict women's access to positions of political power (Leite; Gundim, 2019).

In light of this scenario, the literature identifies institutional mechanisms capable of mitigating these inequalities. Dahlerup (2006) argues that gender quotas serve as essential corrective institutional mechanisms for addressing the structural inequalities that have historically prevented women's access to positions of power. In her analysis, these mechanisms do not constitute privileges but rather necessary strategies to "level the playing field" and compensate for systemic barriers.

Similarly, Lijphart (1999) argues that the design of electoral rules shapes the composition of representative bodies, as proportional representation systems, particularly those with larger district magnitudes, tend to produce more inclusive outcomes. Norris (2004) highlights that proportional list systems increase political parties' ability to nominate more diverse candidate lists, thereby facilitating the election of women, especially when combined with closed-list systems and gender quota policies.

However, although gender quota legislation represents an important normative milestone in promoting women's political participation, its effectiveness has been undermined by the use of dummy candidacies, when political parties formally nominate women solely to comply with legal requirements, without any genuine intention of supporting their election. This strategy weakens the objectives of gender quotas and constitutes an additional barrier to women's political participation (Gomes Neto et al., 2024).

Furthermore, the implementation of gender quotas varies considerably across political parties, reflecting differences in the proportion of female candidates nominated by each party. Consequently, the effectiveness of this mechanism remains limited when it is not accompanied by broader measures aimed at strengthening women's political representation (Luz, 2023; Ferreira, 2022).

In Brazil, despite the progress achieved throughout the twentieth century, women's political representation remains limited, highlighting the persistence of structural inequalities. In this context, affirmative action policies, such as gender quotas, constitute an important mechanism for expanding women's political participation; however, their effectiveness depends on factors such as campaign financing, party support, and media visibility (United Nations, 2020).

Recent studies show that women face multiple barriers throughout their political careers, including gender discrimination, more limited access to networks of power, and greater exposure to political violence (Gomes Neto et al., 2024). These barriers not only hinder women's entry into politics but also compromise their ability to remain in political office and advance to leadership positions.

These factors result in the underrepresentation of women in positions of power and have direct implications for the quality of democracy, as they limit the diversity of perspectives involved in public policymaking. In this regard, women's presence in decision-making spaces is essential for developing more inclusive public policies capable of addressing the needs of diverse social groups (Ceolin et al., 2021).

At the local level, this issue becomes even more significant, given that municipal governments play a central role in implementing public policies that directly affect women's lives. Thus, increasing women's participation in municipal councils and executive offices constitutes a strategic element for promoting gender equality and strengthening democracy (Brasil, 2024).

Therefore, the analysis of women's political participation should consider not only its quantitative dimension, expressed by the number of women elected, but also the structural factors that shape such participation. These include socioeconomic inequalities as well as institutional and cultural dynamics that reproduce women's exclusion, underscoring the need for integrated approaches to promoting gender equality in politics.

METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

Regarding its nature, this study is classified as quantitative research, as it employs statistical and computational techniques to collect numerical data and construct indicators in order to describe a specific phenomenon, thereby providing greater reliability for the discussion of the proposed hypotheses (Creswell; Creswell, 2021).

With respect to its objectives, the study is characterized as descriptive, since it uses statistical results derived from the indicators to describe the phenomenon under investigation, and also exploratory, for it seeks to determine whether the targets established under SDG Target 5.5 and adopted by local governments in Pernambuco are being implemented.

As a case study, this research combines documentary analysis alongside statistical methods based on the comparison of statistical results (Gil, 2019). The selection of the state of Pernambuco as the case study is justified by its prominent electoral profile, as it has the largest female electorate in Northeastern Brazil and the second largest female electorate nationwide, according to data from the Superior Electoral Court (TSE) (Brasil, 2025).

Accordingly, examining the effectiveness of gender quota policies in the context of municipal politics makes it possible to investigate whether the predominance of women in the electorate is effectively reflected in greater female representation in elected positions within the municipal Executive and Legislative branches, or whether significant barriers to political representation persist (Dahlerup, 2006; Gomes Neto et al., 2024).

From Pitkin's (1967) perspective, women's presence in the legislative and executive branches is associated with political effectiveness through both descriptive and substantive representation, grounded in the defense of the interests of those represented. At the municipal level, this dynamic becomes more relevant, as it provides a more detailed analysis on women's political participation and promotes their inclusion in local elections through gender quota policies (Ceolin et al., 2021; Brasil, 2024).

The use of SDG Indicator 5.5.1 of the 2030 Agenda provides an internationally recognized reference framework that is commonly applied in analyses conducted at the national or State level (IPEA, 2024). The innovation of this study lies in adapting this indicator to conduct an expressive analysis of the political equality at the levels of Intermediate and Immediate Geographic Regions, thereby constituting a key

methodological contribution of this research.

Secondary data were obtained from the Superior Electoral Court (TSE) through its TSE Women Interactive Dashboard ("Painel Interativo TSE Mulheres"), using information from the 2024 municipal elections. Data were retrieved by applying the filters available within the platform, according to the following criteria: federation unit (Pernambuco), election type (municipal elections), and branch of government (municipal executive and legislative). Based on this filtering process, data were collected on the proportion of women elected as mayors and city councilors, making it possible to identify women's participation in occupying seats in municipal executive offices and municipal councils throughout the state. The collected data were subsequently organized into an electronic spreadsheet for descriptive analysis, enabling the calculation and interpretation of the proportion of municipal elective offices held by women in Pernambuco.

Using the filtered dataset, the methodology proposed by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) was applied to calculate the Indicator of the Proportion of Seats Held by Women in Local Governments (hereafter referred to as the Percentage of Women Elected), which is expressed as a percentage and calculated according to the following formula:

$$\textbf{Indicator 5.5.1.b} = \frac{\textbf{Number of seats held by women}}{\textbf{Total number of seats}} \times 100$$

Source: IBGE, n.d.

The new classification adopted by the IBGE (2017) was used to define the groups of observation, regarding the territorial division. The restructuring of Pernambuco's regional division was prompted by the obsolescence of the previous 1989 model in light of the profound transformations that had taken place across the national territory, including the reconfiguration of the productive landscape and the increase in the number of municipalities. As a result, the former Mesoregions and Microregions were replaced by the Intermediate Geographic Regions (IGRs) and Immediate Geographic Regions (ImGRs), respectively. Box 1 presents this territorial division for the state of Pernambuco:

Box 1 | Geographic Regions

Intermediate Geographic Region	Immediate Geographic Region
Recife	Recife, Goiana-Timbaúba, Palmares, Limoeiro, Vitória de Santo Antão, Carpina, Barreiros-Sirinhaém, Surubim, Escada - Ribeirão
Caruaru	Caruaru, Garanhuns, Arcoverde, Belo Jardim-Pesqueira
Serra Talhada	Serra Talhada, Afogados da Ingazeira,
Petrolina	Petrolina, Araripina e Salgueiro

Source: IBGE, 2017

The Gender Parity Index (GPI) was also calculated to assess the extent to which women and men are equally represented in a given area. The index is calculated by dividing the value of the indicator for women by the corresponding value for men.

$$\mathbf{GPI} = \frac{Value_{\text{women}}}{Value_{\text{men}}}$$

Source: IBGE, 2018.

A GPI value of 1.00 indicates the ideal scenario of perfect gender parity. However, values below 1.00 indicate inequality to the disadvantage of women, whereas values above 1.00 indicate inequality to the disadvantage of men. According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, a country with a GPI between 0.97 and 1.03 is considered to have achieved acceptable gender parity (Global Partnership for Education, 2018). This way, the intervals below and above the acceptable range were defined proportionally and symmetrically to ensure a consistent interpretation of gender inequalities (Box 2).

Box 2 | Gender Parity Index Classification

Interval	Classification	Interpretation
0,00 ≤GPI < 0,48	Very Poor	Extreme inequality to the disadvantage of women
0,48 ≤ GPI < 0,97	Poor	Inequality to the disadvantage of women
0,97 ≤ GPI ≤1,03	Good (Parity)	Gender parity (internationally accepted range)
1,03 < GPI ≤ 1,52	Poor	Inequality to the disadvantage of men
GPI > 1,52	Very Poor	Extreme inequality to the disadvantage of men

Source: Prepared by the Authors

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Women that seek to enter politics face a context of deep underrepresentation in all levels of power, although remaining a majority of the national electorate (Resende *et al*., 2022). Consequently, Pernambuco presents a high level of underrepresentation of women in the political scenario. Regarding the percentage of women elected for the mayoral office, only 16.30% (30) of those elected for mayor were women. Furthermore, of the 2,147 municipal council seats across Pernambuco, only 16.21% (348) were won by women.

Another factor demonstrating Extreme inequality to the disadvantage of women is the GPI. The number of women elected, relative to that of men, resulted in a GPI classified as "very poor" for both mayoral offices and municipal council seats. This persistent gender inequality arises from a complex web of obstacles, including psychosocial, cultural, and, crucially, party-related barriers (Gomes Neto et al., 2024).

It is also evident that, although gender equality remains far from being achieved, there was a higher representation of women among candidates for municipal council seats (35.30%) than for mayoral offices (16.60%), as shown in Table 1. This finding supports Norris's (2004) argument: proportional electoral systems tend to provide more favorable conditions for women's political participation than majoritarian systems.

This contrast between the substantial presence of female candidates and the limited proportion of women elected highlights the limits of the descriptive representation discussed by Pitkin (1967): the formal expansion of women's candidacies does not, in itself, translate into an effective correspondence between the composition of the electorate (predominantly female) and the composition of elected offices.

Table 1 | Data on Women's Representation in the 2024 Municipal Elections in the State of Pernambuco, Brasil, 2025

Entity	Total Candidates	Female Candidates	% de Female Candidates	Total Elected	Female Elected	% of Female Elected	GPI
Mayor	524	87	16,60%	184	30	16,30%	0,1948
Municipal Council	14994	5288	35,30%	2147	348	16,21%	0,1934

Source: Prepared by the Authors based on data collected on the TSE Women portal, 2025.

The number of female candidates is disproportionate to the number of registered female voters, given that 94% of the municipalities in Pernambuco have a larger female electorate than male electorate. This scenario reveals the persistence of an asymmetry between the composition of the electorate and the occupation of spaces of political representation, despite the existence of gender quotas. This analysis reinforces that this instrument, in isolation, is insufficient to ensure representation consistent with the size of the female electorate (Ferreira, 2022; Luz, 2023).

This disparity can also be understood as a result of structural gender inequalities that extend beyond the political sphere. The gendered division of labor, the disproportionate burden of caregiving responsibilities, and the unequal distribution of resources and opportunities limit the availability of the time, political capital, and support networks necessary to build a political career. Thus, the lower presence of female candidates may not derive from a lack of interest or demographic representativeness but rather from historically entrenched barriers that continue to restrict women's access to positions of political power (Beauvoir, 2024; Biroli, 2018; Cirino, 2021; Leite; Gundim, 2019).

LOCAL GOVERNMENTS (MAYORAL OFFICES)

Women's representation in mayoral offices across all Intermediate Geographic Regions (IGRs) of Pernambuco was characterized by a GPI classified as "very poor." In this regard, the absence of women's participation jeopardizes the development of more inclusive public policies capable of addressing the needs of diverse social groups, consistent with the perspective discussed by Ceolin *et al.* (2021).

Within this context of extreme underrepresentation, the Recife IGR presented the best indicators, with the percentage of women elected (18.6%) exceeding the state average (16.30%). In contrast, the Serra Talhada IGR exhibited the poorest results, with an extremely low GPI of 0.1364 (Table 2).

Table 2 | Data on Women's Representation in the 2024 Municipal Elections for Mayor by Intermediate Geographic Region, Brazil, 2025

Intermediate Geographic Region	Total Candidates	Female Candidates	% of Female Candidates	Total Elected	Female Elected	% of Female Elected	GPI
Recife	230	42	18,3%	70	13	18,6%	0,2281
Caruaru	168	26	15,5%	64	10	15,6%	0,1852
Serra Talhada	60	9	15,0%	25	3	12,0%	0,1364
Petrolina	66	10	15,2%	25	4	16,0%	0,1905

Source: Prepared by the Authors based on data collected on the TSE Women portal, 2025.

Table 3 shows that none of the Immediate Geographic Regions (ImGRs) achieved the ideal scenario of perfect gender parity (1) or even the range considered acceptable by UNESCO (0.97 ≤ GPI ≤ 1.03). Instead, all regions (except the Escada-Ribeirão ImGR, which presented gender inequality to the disadvantage of men with a GPI of 1.5) showed a GPI to the disadvantage of women. Thus, this result for the Escada-Ribeirão ImGR reflects the fact that women won three of the five mayoral offices contested (representing 60% of those elected).

The Petrolina and Carpina ImGRs recorded GPIs classified as "poor", to the disadvantage of women. Moreover, the Recife ImGR, which may be regarded as one of the most significant regions because it accounts for 42.53% of Pernambuco's electorate (according to data from TRE-PE), exhibited a GPI of 0.2500, classified as "very poor." In addition, the Barreiros-Sirinhaém, Limoeiro, and Vitória de Santo Antão ImGRs stood out negatively, as they recorded a GPI of 0.

The heterogeneity observed across the ImGRs reinforces the relevance of an interpretation anchored in regional development, as gender inequality in political representation is not distributed uniformly across the territory. In this context, the underrepresentation observed in the Recife ImGR is particularly noteworthy, given its high concentration of female voters. This paradox (where the region with the largest electoral weight coexists with persistent underrepresentation) confirms that the numerical presence of female voters does not automatically translate into descriptive representation (Pitkin, 1967) and suggests that women's limited participation in politics may undermine both gender equality and the strengthening of democracy (Brasil, 2024).

Table 3 | GPI Ranking for Mayor Elections - Brasil, 2025

Position	Immediate Geographic Region	GPI
1ª	ImGRs Escada - Ribeirão	1,5000
2ª	ImGRs Petrolina	0,5000
3ª	ImGRs Carpina	0,5000
4ª	ImGRs Palmares	0,4286
5ª	ImGRs Recife	0,2500
6ª	ImGRs Garanhuns	0,2222
7ª	ImGRs Caruaru	0,2000
8ª	ImGRs Surubim	0,2000
9ª	ImGRs Serra Talhada	0,1818
10ª	ImGRs Belo Jardim - Pesqueira	0,1674
11ª	ImGRs Salgueiro	0,1250
12ª	ImGRs Araripina	0,1111
13ª	ImGRs Arcoverde	0,1000
14ª	ImGRs Goiana - Timbaúba	0,1000
15ª	ImGRs Afogados da Ingazeira	0,0909
16ª	ImGRs Barreiros - Sirinhaém	0
16ª	ImGRs Limoeiro	0
18ª	ImGRs Vitória de Santo Antão	0

Source: Prepared by Authors (2026).

MUNICIPAL PARLIAMENTS

The Municipal Councils elections featured greater female representation among candidates; however, this did not translate into a higher proportion of women elected to office. All IGRs recorded a GPI classified as “very poor.” Nevertheless, the Petrolina IGR stood out positively, with both a higher GPI (0.2415) and a higher percentage of women elected (19.45%) than the other regions and the state average (Table 4). The underrepresentation of women in Municipal Councils undermines the capacity of municipal legislative bodies to legislate on matters of local interest, as established by the Federal Constitution (Brasil, 1988), mainly with regard to the formulation of public policies addressing the needs of women (Ceolin et al., 2021).

The Recife IGR recorded the highest number of women elected (145). Nevertheless, women remained underrepresented due to a low percentage of female candidates who were elected (% of elected), with women accounting for only 16.94%. The higher proportion of female candidates for Municipal Councils, compared with mayoral elections, may have been influenced by Brazil's gender quota legislation, which requires political parties to nominate at least 30% and no more than 70% of candidates of each gender. These quotas apply to proportional elections, including those for municipal councilors (Table 4).

Table 4 | Data of Female Representation in the 2024 Municipal Elections for Municipal Councilor by Intermediate Geographic Region - Brazil, 2025

Intermediate Geographic Region	Total Candidates	Female	% of Female Candidates	Total Elected	Female Elected	% of Female Elected	GPI
Recife	8037	2836	35,29%	856	145	16,94%	0,2039
Caruaru	4280	1494	34,91%	735	100	13,61%	0,1575
Serra Talhada	1210	431	35,62%	263	46	17,49%	0,2120
Petrolina	1467	527	35,92%	293	57	19,45%	0,2415

Source: Prepared by the Authors from data collected on the TSE Women portal, 2025.

This finding reinforces Dahlerup's (2006) argument that gender quotas constitute institutional mechanisms aimed at reducing the structural inequalities that have historically limited women's access to positions of power. Accordingly, gender quota policies may represent corrective mechanisms designed to expand women's participation (Dahlerup, 2006), although their effect remains largely confined to securing access to the nomination, rather than to winning elections, thereby signaling the persistence of the "glass ceiling" in the political sphere as well (Vaz, 2021).

All ImGRs recorded a GPI classified as "very poor," indicating extreme inequality to the disadvantage of women. Within this unfavorable context for achieving gender parity, the Araripina ImGR stood out positively, with women winning 29 of the 118 seats on Municipal Councils, representing 24.6% of those elected (Table 5).

Table 5 | GPI Ranking of Municipal Councils election - Brasil, 2025

Position	Immediate Geographic Region	GPI
1ª	ImGR Araripina	0,3258
2ª	ImGR Afogados da Ingazeira	0,2766
3ª	ImGR Surubim	0,2500
4ª	ImGR Escada - Ribeirão	0,2326
5ª	ImGR Limoeiro	0,2222
6ª	ImGR Vitória de Santo Antão	0,2195
7ª	ImGR Petrolina	0,2188
8ª	ImGR Palmares	0,2093
9ª	ImGR Arcoverde	0,2075
10ª	ImGR Recife	0,1990
11ª	ImGR Carpina	0,1930
12ª	ImGR Goiana - Timbaúba	0,1869
13ª	ImGR Salgueiro	0,1687
14ª	ImGR Serra Talhada	0,1626
15ª	ImGR Belo Jardim - Pesqueira	0,1571
16ª	ImGR Barreiros - Sirinhaém	0,1569
17ª	ImGR Garanhuns	0,1527
18ª	ImGR Caruaru	0,1406

Source: Prepared by the Authors

In summary, these findings reveal the challenges to achieving SDG 5 of the 2030 Agenda, particularly Target 5.5, which calls for women's full and effective participation at all levels of decision-making. Considering that gender equality constitutes a structural element of sustainable development (Barbieri, 2020), the underrepresentation of women in electoral processes compromises not only democratic equity, but also the capacity to generate more inclusive and representative public policies (Ceolin et al., 2021).

Therefore, the predominance of women within the electorate, unaccompanied by proportional participation among candidatures, demonstrates that normative advances have not yet been sufficient to overcome the institutional, social, and cultural barriers that continue to limit women's participation in politics (Marques; Pompeu, 2022).

Overall, the findings reveal an asymmetry between municipal Executive and Legislative offices: in mayoral elections, women accounted for 16.60% of all candidates, whereas in municipal council they represented 35.30%. This difference reflects the effect of gender quotas in proportional elections and supports Lijphart's (1999) argument that proportional electoral systems favor representative diversity. However, this effect dissipates when converting candidacies into secured elections, as the percentage of women elected to Municipal Councils declines by 19.09%, falling from 35.30% to 16.21%. These findings confirm that gender quotas facilitate access to candidacy, but do not alter the underlying structure of the competition, reinforcing the necessary, yet insufficient, nature of corrective mechanisms discussed by Dahlerup (2006).

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In light of the findings presented, it is evident that women's participation in the political landscape of Pernambuco, when examined through the lens of Target 5.5 of the 2030 Agenda, continues to face significant challenges, falling short of achieving gender parity in positions of power and decision-making. Although gender quota policies have contributed to an increase in the number of female candidates for Municipal Councils, the results of the 2024 municipal elections demonstrated that this progress did not translate into proportionate victories in actual elected office. Women occupied only 16.30% of mayoral offices and 16.21% of seats on Municipal Councils, resulting in a Gender Parity Index (GPI) classified as "very poor."

The findings also indicate the existence of structural and cultural barriers that continue to hinder women's representation in political decision-making. Although gender quota legislation and affirmative action policies have contributed to expanding the number of female candidates, they have not yet ensured equitable conditions or equal access to elected public office.

The differences among the Intermediate Geographic Regions of Pernambuco indicate that gender inequality is not homogeneously distributed, but instead reflects local factors, such as the electoral weight of state capitals. In regions with the largest female electorates, such as Recife, women's underrepresentation persists, reinforcing the need for more effective policies to promote female leadership and strengthen women's participation in elected office positions.

It can therefore be concluded that Pernambuco has not achieved Indicator 5.5.1 of SDG 5, since the proportion of women holding elected positions remains well below the level required for acceptable gender parity. To overcome this gap, improvements to gender quota policies are required, as well as stronger mechanisms for monitoring party compliance, in accordance with the transformation of the cultural and institutional practices that continue to perpetuate the exclusion of women from politics. Strengthening local female leadership, expanding political education, and combating gender-based political violence are likewise essential to promoting a more representative, inclusive, and democratically responsive political system aligned with the commitments of the 2030 Agenda.

Finally, this study indicates the need for future research that can project progress towards the achievement of SDG Target 5.5 by 2030. There is a need for studies that can quantitatively assess, on the basis of gender parity indicators and political development scenarios, the likelihood of Pernambuco achieving the targets established under the 2030 Agenda, while identifying the strategies most likely to accelerate this process. In addition, qualitative analyses of women's political trajectories could provide valuable insights into manners to overcome the "glass ceiling."

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