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ABSTRACT

This research study analyzes the origin, the contradictions and the advances made in the political participation of women in the Americas and the Caribbean, and is focused on exploring the timeline from the moment women were granted the right to vote until they earned the right to be elected. Likewise, it documents the reforms that have contributed to going from affirmative actions, such as the quota system, to the constitutional principle of parity. The result of normative changes can be measured numerically: first, the female leaders who have been presidents or prime ministers are identified, and secondly, the formation of the executive, legislative and judicial branches by gender in these countries is shown. The constitutional reforms and affirmative actions (such as quotas and gender parity) that have enabled the inclusion of women are examined through a documentary and descriptive approaches. Even though the research study evaluates the track record of the women who have held the presidency or who have been head of government in the region until 2026, emphasis is placed on the cases of female political leaders in Mexico and Peru.

Keywords: Women's political and electoral rights. Women's political participation. Political representation of women. Women's political leadership. Gender parity. Women and power.

RESUMEN

Esta investigación analiza el origen, las contradicciones y los avances de la participación política de las mujeres en América y el Caribe, centrándose en datar desde el derecho a votar hasta el derecho a ser electas. Así mismo, documenta las reformas que han contribuido para pasar de medidas afirmativas como el sistema de cuotas hacia el principio constitucional de paridad. El resultado de los cambios normativos puede medirse numéricamente, primero se identifican las lideresas que han sido presidentas o primeras ministras; así como también se muestra la conformación, por sexo, del poder ejecutivo, legislativo y judicial en estos países. Mediante un enfoque documental y descriptivo, se examinan las reformas constitucionales y acciones afirmativas —como cuotas y paridad— que han permitido la inclusión femenina. Si bien, el estudio evalúa las trayectorias de mujeres que han ocupado la presidencia o jefatura de gobierno en la región hasta 2026, se hace un énfasis en los casos de lideresas políticas en México y Perú.

Palabras clave: Derechos político-electorales de las mujeres. Participación política de las mujeres. Representación política de las mujeres. Liderazgo político femenino. Paridad de género. Mujeres y poder.

INTRODUCTION

In the Americas and in both the insular and the continental Caribbean, women's access to power is undeniable, and, apparently, irreversible, and despite relentless resistance, there have been significant changes. In some countries, the hegemonic paradigm shift of the distribution of power has been driven by regulations in order to guarantee women's political participation, which has been carried out through the inclusion of women in the public space, in decision-making processes, in the spheres of power and influence, and also through quotas and gender parity in candidacy for elected offices and for autonomous bodies.

It has been documented until 2026 that only under 40 women in the region have been elected or interim presidents, or prime ministers. Currently, with regard to legislative power, some normative and numerical advances are evident as well, albeit there are still some challenges at the state, local and judicial levels. Furthermore, phenomena such as gender-based political violence against women have become evident as limits of equity and equality. Even though there are some numerical advances to document, authors like García-Beaudoux point out that being in those spaces does not mean that all women have power and that are fully represented. We must avoid the *Nirvana ceilings*, term which refers to "the standstill or deactivation of the actions that pursue equality as a consequence of an illusion or false belief: the illusion that inequality has been overcome." (2017).

In that regard, the aim of this research is to analyze the origin, the contradictions and the advances of women's political participation in the Americas and the Caribbean, zeroing in on dating significant events from the guarantee of the political-electoral rights, the desirable gender parity participation, to female leadership and the numerical representation in recent years. Whilst part of this study is focused on exploring the reforms that have contributed to the numerical increase, there are also cases, like the Mexican and Peruvian ones, that pose important challenges to the leaderships of the female incumbent presidents.

METHODOLOGY

This research identifies the origin, contradictions and advances of women's political participation in the Americas, and in the insular and the continental Caribbean through documentary and descriptive research. We will first date the struggles that consolidated women's suffrage and their right to candidacy since various constitutional reforms to laws and regulations guaranteed citizenship to half of the population. We should not fail to mention that one of the most relevant findings is that women were almost always granted citizenship gradually. For instance, citizenship is guaranteed first at a local level and then nationwide. However, there were some excluded groups such as uneducated women, women from some socioeconomic status, ethnic groups, etc. Secondly, we analyze how affirmative actions, from the quota system to gender parity, started consolidating the shift in the hegemonic paradigm of the distribution of power based on gender. Thirdly, female leadership is acknowledged, such as presidents or female prime ministers in the region. Research shows that most of these women consolidated their participation in crisis scenarios and/or their leaderships are related to male leaderships. The foregoing portrays that although there is no subordination of the female leaders, there is definitely a symbolic element that conditions it. Fourth, changes in the composition of power are documented numerically. Lastly, the cases of Mexico and Peru are depicted; Mexico is a scenario where electoral rules have guaranteed a greater participation of women, whereas Peru portrays the challenges that still remain, not only in terms of formal equality, but also substantive equality.

WOMEN AND POLITICS: ECHOES OF STRUGGLES, RESISTANCES, AND CHANGES

Women's right to vote in the region has been the result of a peaceful struggle, as it is not granted to us but rather conquered. In this sense, in Table 1, the chronology of women's decision-making autonomy in the Americas and the Caribbean (right to vote), we can observe at least three waves. Among the pioneering countries are Canada (1917) and the United States (1920); the consolidation countries are Panama (1941) and Dominican Republic (1942); the late recognition of this right is in Bahamas (1961) and Paraguay (1961), to name a few.

Table 1 | Chronology of women's decision-making autonomy in the Americas (right to vote)

Country	Women's Suffrage	Women's right to run as candidates for elections
Antigua and Barbuda	1951, National, Universal; 1981 (independence)	1951, National
Argentina	1947, National, Universal (in some provinces this right was guaranteed in former dates)	1947, National
Bahamas	1961, National, Universal	1962, National
Barbados	1950, National, Universal, 1966 (independence)	1950, National
Belize	1954, National; 1981, National, Universal (independence)	1954, National
Bolivia	1938, National, Restricted; 1952, National, Universal	1938, National; 1952, National
Brazil	1932, National	1932, National
Canada	1917, National, Restricted; 1918, National, Restricted; 1950, National, Restricted; 1960, National, Universal	1919, House of Commons; 1929, Senate; 1950, Native American; 1960, National, Universal
Chile	1931, Local; 1949, National, Universal	1931, Local; 1949, National
Colombia	1954, National, Universal	1954, National
Costa Rica	1949, National, Universal	1949, National
Cuba	1934, National, Universal	1934, National
Dominica	1951; 1978, National, Universal (independence)	1951, National
Ecuador	1929, National, Restricted; 1967, National, Universal, it became mandatory for both sexes in 1967	1929
El Salvador ****	1939; 1950	1961, National
The United States	1920, National, Universal; 1965, National, Universal	1788, the constitution didn't mention gender for any of its Chambers
Grenada	1951, National, Universal; 1974 (independence)	1951, National
Guatemala	1946, National, Restricted, 1985, National, Universal	1946, National, Restricted; 1965, National, Universal
Guyana	1945; 1953; 1966, National, Universal (independence)	1945; 1953; 1966 (independence)
Haiti	1950, National, Universal, the Constitution of 1987 expanded the right to vote to all the citizens and it established gender equality.	1957, National
Honduras	1955, National, Universal	1955, National
Jamaica	1944; 1962, National, Universal (independence)	1944; 1962, National, Universal (independence)
Mexico	1947, Municipal; 1953, National	1953, National
Nicaragua *	1955	1955
Panama	1941, National, Restricted; 1946, National, Universal	1941, National, Restricted; 1946, National, Universal
Paraguay	1961, National, Universal	1961, National
Peru	1955, National	1955, National
Puerto Rico **	1929; 1935, National, Universal	1929; 1935, National, Universal
Dominican Republic ***	1942	1942
Saint Kitts and Nevis	1951; 1983, National, Universal (independence)	1951; 1983, National, Universal (independence)
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	1951, National, Universal; 1979 (independence)	1951, National, Universal; 1979 (independence)
Saint Lucia	1951; 1979, National, Universal (independence)	1951; 1979, National, Universal (independence)
Suriname	1948; 1975, National, Universal (independence)	1948; 1975, National, Universal (independence)
Trinidad and Tobago	1945; 1962, National, Universal (independence)	1945; 1962, National, Universal (independence)
Uruguay	1932, National, Universal	1932, National
Venezuela	1946, National, Universal	1946, National

Source: authors' elaboration based on INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION, 2025, * MONTENEGRO, 2012, ** BORIA, s.f., *** AQUINO, 2002, p. 335, **** GARCÍA, 2026

Note: In Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Saint Lucia, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago, women's suffrage was ratified after the independence as they are part of both the insular and continental Caribbean with British and Dutch background.

The right to be elected was almost always guaranteed in synchrony with the right to vote, even though the massive influx would be the result of affirmative actions like the quota system and the gender parity in candidacy. It is worth mentioning that the gradual incorporation of women is attributable to symbolic and cultural elements such as the stereotypes and differentiating roles between men and women, or alternatively, to the socialization processes based on gender. Also, this can be attributed to economic limitations, time constraints or to barriers that are not necessarily related to talent, but to expertise in the codes of politics as a field of mediation and negotiation, and to aspects such as the structural frontier that political parties and their leaderships impose, or social phenomena such as gender-based political violence against women.

Table 2, chronology of women's autonomy in decision-making in the Americas (the right to be elected, including gender parity as a criterion) compiles the reforms that enabled the integration of nomination mechanisms based on affirmative actions, and the transition from a quota system to gender parity in these countries. Although there are countries that have the principle of gender parity in candidacy— such as Argentina (Law No. 27,412, 2017), Bolivia (Law No. 026 and Constitution, 2010), Costa Rica (Law No. 8765, 2009), Ecuador (Constitution, 2008), Honduras (Constitution, 2016), Mexico (Constitution, 2014), Nicaragua (Law No. 790, 2012), Panama (Law No. 247, 2021), and Peru (Law No. 31030, 2020)—, the composition of decision-making spaces, power, and influence is not necessarily equitable. Challenges persist across the executive, legislative, and judicial branches; in government bodies and at the federal, state, and local levels, among others.

Table 2 | Chronology of women's autonomy in decision-making in the Americas (the right to be elected with parity)

Country	Year of the first reform	Minimum percentage of representation	Year of subsequent reforms	Minimum percentage of representation	Year of subsequent reforms	Minimum percentage of representation	Year of subsequent reforms	Minimum percentage of representation
Argentina	1991	30	2017	50				
Bolivia	1997	30	2010	50				
Brazil	1997	30						
Chile	2015	40						
Colombia	2011	30						
Costa Rica	1996	40	2009	50				
Dominican Republic	1997	25	2000	33	2018	40		
Ecuador	1998	20	2000	30	2009	50		
El Salvador	2013	30						
Honduras	2000	30	2004	30	2012	40	2016	50
Mexico	1996	30	2002	30	2008	40	2014 - 2017	50
Nicaragua	2008-2010	50	2012	50				
Panama	1997	30	2012	50				
Paraguay	1996	20						
Peru*	1997	25	2000	30	2019	40	2021	50
Uruguay	2009 -2017	33.3						

Source: Authors' elaboration based on SLAVIERO, 2021, *LLANOS, 2022

Note: In Brazil, Chile, and Colombia, there are earlier reforms not indicated in the original source.

In summary, tables 1 and 2 depict the legal mechanisms, the constitutional reforms, the laws, the political-electoral regulations and guidelines that ensure women's political participation. Albeit these portray the changes historically, the echoes of resistance might be tangible in the scarce representation of women in the executive branch. Table 3, female presidents or prime ministers in the Americas, the insular and continental Caribbean, shows the women who have held the highest position of political responsibility in some countries of the region, it identifies the female leaders, the position they held, the period, whether their exercise of duties was the product of an election, or they were interim, as well as the reason for stepping down.

Table 3 | Female presidents or prime ministers in the Americas, the insular and the continental Caribbean

Country	Full name	Position	Years	Elected / Interim	Reason for leaving	Source
Argentina	María Estela Martínez de Perón	President of the country	1974 - 1976	Constitutional succession	Overthrown through a coup d'état	(ARGENTINA, 2020)
Argentina	Cristina Elisabet Fernández de Kirchner	President of the country	2007 - 2011	Elected	End of term	(ARGENTINA, 2020)
Netherlands Antilles	Maria Liberia-Peters	Prime Minister	1984 - 1986	Designated	End of the government coalition	(COUNCIL OF WOMEN WORLD LEADERS, [s. d.])
Netherlands Antilles	Maria Liberia-Peters	Prime Minister	1988 - 1993	Designated	Resigned due to a political crisis	(COUNCIL OF WOMEN WORLD LEADERS, [s. d.])
Netherlands Antilles	Suzanne Camelia-Römer	Prime Minister	1993	Designated	End of term (Provisional government)	(COUNCIL OF WOMEN WORLD LEADERS, [s. d.])
Netherlands Antilles	Suzanne Camelia-Römer	Prime Minister	1998 - 1999	Designated	End of the government coalition	(COUNCIL OF WOMEN WORLD LEADERS, [s. d.])
Aruba	Evelyna Wever-Croes	Prime Minister	2017 - present	Elected (Designated)	In office	(COUNCIL OF WOMEN WORLD LEADERS, [s. d.])
Bahamas	Cynthia Alexandria Pratt	Prime Minister	2005	Interim (succession)	Return of the incumbent Prime Minister	(BAHAMAS, [s. d.])
		Governor General	2023 - present	Appointed by Charles III	In office	(BAHAMAS, [s. d.])
Barbados	Mia Amor Mottley	Prime Minister	2018 - 2022	Elected (Designated)	End of term	(BARBADOS, [s. d.])
			2022 - 2026	Elected (Designated)	End of term	
			2026 – present	Elected (Designated)	In office	
Barbados	Sandra Prunella Mason	President	2021 - 2025	Elected (Parliament)	End of term	(BARBADOS, [s. d.])
Bolivia	Lidia Gueiler Tejada	President of the Republic	1979 - 1980	Interim (Designated)	Overthrown through a coup d'état	(CENTRO INTERNACIONAL DE ESTUDIOS SUPERIORES DE PERIODISMO PARA AMÉRICA LATINA, [s. d.])
Bolivia	Jeanine Áñez Chávez	Head of State	2019 - 2020	Interim (Succession)	End of term	(BARCELONA CENTRE FOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS, [s. d.])
Brazil	Dilma Vana Rousseff	President of the Republic	2011 - 2014	Elected	End of term	(CARRIE CHAPMAN CATT CENTER FOR WOMEN AND POLITICS, [s. d.])
			2014 - 2016	Elected	Impeached	(CARRIE CHAPMAN CATT CENTER FOR WOMEN AND POLITICS, [s. d.])
Chile	Verónica Michelle Bachelet Jeria	President of the Republic	2006 - 2010	Elected	End of term	(CHILE, [s. d.]
			2014 - 2018	Elected	End of term	(CHILE, [s. d.]
Costa Rica	Laura Chinchilla Miranda	President of the Republic	2010 - 2014	Elected	End of term	(COSTA RICA, 2010)
Dominica	Mary Eugenia Charles	Prime Minister	1980 - 1985	Elected (Designated)	End of term	(ENCYCLOPAEDIA BRITANNICA, [s. d.])
			1985 - 1990	Elected (Designated)	End of term	(ENCYCLOPAEDIA BRITANNICA, [s. d.])
			1990 - 1995	Elected (Designated)	Voluntary withdrawal	(ENCYCLOPAEDIA BRITANNICA, [s. d.])
Dominica	Sylvanie Burton	President	2023-Present	Elected (Assembly)	In office	(DOMINICA, [s. d.])
Ecuador	Rosalía Arteaga Serrano	President of the Republic	1997 (6 days)	Interim (Succession)	Stepped down under pressure	(ARTEAGA SERRANO, [s. d.])

El Salvador	Claudia Juana Rodríguez	Presidencial Designate in functions of the office	2023 - 2024 (6 months)	Designated (Endorsed by Assembly)	Nayib Bukele's leave of absence ended and took over the new presidential term	(BBC NEWS MUNDO, 2023)
Guyana	Janet Rosalie Jagan	Prime Minister	1997	Designated	Prime Minister term ended and became the President	(CHEDDI JAGAN RESEARCH CENTRE, [s. d.])
		President	1997 - 1999	Elected	Stepped down due to health issues	(CHEDDI JAGAN RESEARCH CENTRE, [s. d.])
Haiti	Ertha Pascal-Trouillot	Acting President	1990 - 1991	Interim (Designated)	End of term	(DANTIL, 2017)
Haiti	Claudette Antoine Werleigh	Appointed Prime Minister	1995 - 1996	Appointed	End of term	(DANTIL, 2017)
Haiti	Florence Duperval Guillaume	Interim Prime Minister	2014 - 2015	Interim (Designated)	End of term	(HAITI, 2014)
Haiti	Michèle Duvivier Pierre-Louis	Prime Minister	2008 - 2009	Appointed	Removed by a vote of no confidence	(HAITI, 2014)
Honduras	Iris Xiomara Castro Sarmiento	President of the Republic	2022 - 2026	Elected	End of term	(HONDURAS, 2021)
Jamaica	Portia Lucretia Simpson-Miller	Prime Minister	2006 - 2007	Interim (succession)	End of term	(BARCELONA CENTRE FOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS, [s. d.])
			2012 - 2016	Elected (Designated)	End of term	(BARCELONA CENTRE FOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS, [s. d.])
Mexico	Claudia Sheinbaum Pardo	President of the Republic	2024 - Present	Elected	In office	(MÉXICO, 2024)
Nicaragua	Violeta Barrios de Chamorro	President of the Republic	1990 - 1997	Elected	End of term	(KINZER, 2025)
Nicaragua	Rosario María Murillo Zambrana	Co-president of the Republic	2025 - Present	Elected	In office	(MALDONADO, 2025)
Panama	Mireya Elisa Moscoso Rodríguez	President of the Republic	1999 - 2004	Elected	End of term	(PANAMÁ, 2001)
Peru	Dina Ercilia Boluarte Zegarra	President of the Republic	2022 - 2025	Interim (Succession)	Removed from office due to vacancy (moral incapacity)	(PERÚ, 2025)
Peru	Keiko Sofía Fujimori Higuchi	President of the Republic	2026-2031	Elected	In office	(PERÚ, 2026)
Sint Maarten	Silveria Jacobs	Prime Minister	2019 - 2024	Designated	End of term (Elections)	(SINT MAARTEN, 2024)
Suriname	Jennifer Geerlings-Simons	President of the Republic	2025 - Present	Elected (Assembly)	In office	(CHHABRA, 2025)
Trinidad and Tobago	Kamla Persad-Bissessar	Prime Minister	2010 - 2015	Elected (Designated)	End of term	(TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO, 2025)
			2025 - present	Elected (Designated)	In office	
Trinidad and Tobago	Paula-Mae Weekes	President	2018 - 2023	Elected (Electoral College)	End of term	(TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO, 2026)
Trinidad and Tobago	Christine Carla Kangaloo	President	2023 - Present	Elected (Electoral College)	In office	(TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO, 2026)
Venezuela	Delcy Eloína Rodríguez Gómez	President of the Republic	2026 - Present	Interim (Designated by TSJ in the absence of the President)	In office	(BERMÚDEZ, 2026)

Source: Authors' elaboration

Some elements that stand out in table 3 are the methods through which female leaders achieved accession to power, their office tenure, ties with male leaderships, approval ratings during their mandate or even their political fate. It is noted that presidential and parliamentary systems prevail in the region. Some processes of accession to power are: women who have been elected through direct popular vote in presidential systems. In parliamentary systems, they are designated or appointed by the assembly, electoral college or parliament. When there are scenarios of vacancy, interims through constitutional succession or political nomination. There are also some exceptions such as political appointments.

Even though it is relevant to know how they come to power, it is also important to identify the grounds for termination of mandate as it may happen due to end of term, they might be overthrown through coups d'état, removed from office or they might still be in office. It is noteworthy that María Estela Martínez de Perón (Argentina) or Lidia Gueiler Tejada (Bolivia) were overthrown through a coup d'état; Dilma Vana Rousseff (Brazil) was impeached in her second mandate; Rosalía Arteaga Serrano (Ecuador) resigned owing to political pressure, Michèle Duvivier Pierre-Louis (Haiti) was removed by a vote of no confidence, among others. A case study is Dina Ercilia Boluarte Zegarra (Peru), who is the worst rated former president in her mandate. She took over the presidency through succession and was removed from office due to vacancy (on moral incapacity grounds). She represents a leadership that turned from hope into disenchantment. Cristina Elisabet Fernández de Kirchner (Argentina) is currently serving a six-year sentence for corruption and she has a lifetime political ban. The tenure in office is not homogenous either. For instance, Rosalía Arteaga Serrano was in office just for six days and she resigned due to political pressure, as opposed to Mary Eugenia Charles (Dominica) who was the prime minister for 15 years.

Sociologically, it is important to recognize the political capital patterns; the different female leaders are directly or indirectly linked to the gatekeepers because males have historically represented not only the power, but they are also in charge of its distribution. For example, some female leaderships are related to their husbands' presidencies in their nations: María Estela Martínez de Perón (Juan Domingo Perón, former president of Argentina), Cristina Elisabet Fernández de Kirchner (Néstor Kirchner, former president of Argentina), Janet Rosalie Jagan (Cheddi Jagan, former president of Guyana), Iris Xiomara Castro Sarmiento (Manuel Zelaya, former president of Honduras), Violeta Barrios de Chamorro (Pedro Joaquín Chamorro Cardenal, an assassinated opposition leader), Rosario María Murillo Zambrana (Daniel Ortega, Co-president of Nicaragua), Mireya Elisa Moscoso Rodríguez

(Arnulfo Arias Madrid, former president of Panama).

There is not necessarily a political subordination of female leaderships to male ones, although the link almost always has a symbolic component. The political sphere is a field that establishes a pattern of synergies as the logic of power is, in itself, a group logic with legacies and shared political capitals. The rest of the female leaders in table 3 are associated with preceding charismatic leaderships. To name a couple of them we have Dilma Vana Rousseff (Brazil) or Claudia Sheinbaum Pardo (Mexico), associated with Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and Andrés Manuel López Obrador, respectively. However, there are also alliances between women. In this particular case, we should point out the alliance between the Prime Minister Mia Amor Mottley and Sandra Prunella Mason. The former supported the latter so that she could be elected by parliament, and thus Sandra Prunella Mason became the first president. Both of them shared those public spaces in this decade.

In table 4, we can see the echoes of change as the numerical advance is an indicator that allows us to quantify the number of women in these spaces. The first element to be highlighted is that there is not always a gender-balanced composition in the power structures because the mechanisms, such as the quota system or gender parity, are elements that are only present in the nomination process, mediated by the election contest, and they do not necessarily reflect the composition in office; in other words, how many women are elected in the end. Another element to consider is that, whereas there are more women, women from ethnic-racial minorities, from middle- or low-socioeconomic backgrounds, with lower levels of education, young women and elderly women, women of diverse sexual orientations, among other disadvantaged groups, are not being represented, nor are their agendas.

The composition of power structures unfolds the challenges and the advances that remain in the region. It is worth noting that in the lower house of Paraguay women only account for 23.8% and in the upper house they account for 22.2% (2025). In Peru, only 4.8% of the mayors are women. In Argentina, in 2026, there are no women serving as judges in the Supreme Court of Justice of the Nation. In contrast, in countries such as Mexico in 2025, the composition of the Senate of the Republic, the Chamber of Deputies, and the Supreme Court of Justice of the Nation is gender-balanced. Nevertheless, there were still challenges at the local level in 2021, as only 23.6% of municipal presidencies were led by women. Another case of an almost gender-balanced composition or with only minimal percentage differences is Cuba. Yet, overall, all countries in the region still face significant challenges.

Table 4 | Percentage of congresswomen, councilwomen and female judges in the Americas

Country	Unicameral 2025	Lower House 2025	Upper House 2025	Female Mayors 2021	Elected Councilwomen 2024	Female judges of the highest court or the Supreme Court 2025
Antigua and Barbuda		5,6	41,2			50,0
Argentina		42,4	45,8			0,0
Bahamas		17,9	31,3			58,3
Barbados		26,7	33,3			
Belize		12,5	35,7	11,1	32,1	38,5
Bolivia		46,2	55,6	6,6	50,7	33,3
Brazil		18,1	19,8	12,1	18,2	9,1
Canada		30,3	54,8			
Chile		35,1	26	17,1	33,5	52,9
Colombia		29,4	31,4	12,0	19,7	26,3
Costa Rica	49,1			9,8	47,1	40,9
Cuba	55,7			47,0	44,2	54,5
Dominica	40,6					50,0
Ecuador	45			8,1	40,3	36,4
El Salvador	31,7			11,1		21,4
The United States		29	26			
Grenada		31,3	30,8			50,0
Guatemala	20			3,2	13,1	38,5
Guyana	39,4					
Haiti						45,5
Honduras	27,3			7,4		53,3
British Virgin Islands						50,0
Jamaica		28,6	40		19,7	71,1
Mexico		50,2	50	23,6		50,0
Montserrat						50,0
Nicaragua	54,9			42,5		
Panama	21,7			14,8	12,9	66,7
Paraguay		23,8	22,2	11,9	22,6	11,1
Peru*		42*	27*	4,8	47,7	31,6
Puerto Rico				11,5		33,3
Dominican Republic		36,8	12,5	12,0	25,8	25,0
Saint Kitts and Nevis	31,3					50,0
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	21,7					50,0
Saint Lucia		10,5	54,5			50,0
Suriname	31,4					
Trinidad and Tobago		23,8	25,8			37,5
Uruguay		31,3		17,6	31,6	60,0
Venezuela				18,8	48,9	45,0

Source: Authors' elaboration based on INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION, 2025, * CONGRESO DE LA REPÚBLICA, 2026

Source: Authors' elaboration based on ECLAC, 2025, * CONGRESO DE LA REPÚBLICA, 2026

The datum of Peru for the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate corresponds to the electoral results of the 2026 electoral process; those for female mayors correspond to 2021, councilwomen to 2024, and the court to 2025. An important change in the 2026 electoral process was the shift from a unicameral to a bicameral system; the regional and municipal elections will be held in October 2026.

FROM SIMULATION OF COMPLIANCE TO NUMERICAL PROGRESS: MEXICO

In Mexico, attuned to regional changes and social mobilization, the decree reforming Article 115 was published on February 12th, 1947, stating that "in municipal elections, women shall participate on equal terms with men, with the right to vote and be elected" (Diario Oficial de la Federación, 1947). On October 17th, 1953, Article 34 of the Constitution was amended to recognize citizenship for men and women aged 18, if unmarried at age 21, and who had an honest means of living (Diario Oficial de la Federación, 1953).

In 1996, quotas were introduced with the addition of the twenty-second transitional provision to the COFIPE (*Federal Code of Electoral Institutions and Procedures),* specifying that political parties should ensure that candidacies for the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate, under both electoral principles, would not exceed 70% for the same gender (CARBONELL, 2003). In 2002, sanctions for noncompliance were included, specifying 70% for men and 30% for women (REYNOSO; D'ANGELO, 2006). In 2008, Article 219 changed the number to 60% men and 40% women for candidacies in the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate, and Article 221 introduced admonitions (Diario Oficial de la Federación, 2008). In 2009, eight federal representatives, known as the "Juanitas," requested leave, and their male alternates assumed office.

Consequently, owing to noncompliance with the quotas, in 2011, María Elena Chapa and other female leaders filed a lawsuit against the compliance exceptions; the court issued ruling SUP-JDC-12624/2011, and political parties were forced to comply with the quotas without exception (TRIBUNAL ELECTORAL DEL PODER JUDICIAL DE LA FEDERACIÓN, 2011). In 2014, in Article 41, gender parity was assigned a constitutional status regarding the nomination of federal and local legislators (ONU MUJERES MÉXICO, 2014). In 2019, gender parity in all areas was expanded across the three branches of the government (executive, legislative, and judicial), the three governing bodies (federal, state, and local), constitutionally autonomous bodies, political parties, and Indigenous normative systems.

In sum, all the normative changes today have implications in the executive, legislative and judicial power structure and in others. In México, in 2025, the lower house had 50.2% female representation, the upper house had 50% (INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION, 2025). In 2024, 29.52% of city and town councils are led by a female mayor; there are 69.21% female municipal trustees, and 53.88% are female

municipal councilors (INSTITUTO NACIONAL DE LAS MUJERES, 2024). In the judicial branch, the number of female ministers makes up 50% (SUPREMA CORTE DE JUSTICIA DE LA NACIÓN, 2025). Moreover, in 2026, 13 states are governed by women. And, in 2024, after more than 200 years of Independent Mexico, the first female president was elected, after 65 males had been in office.

From the guarantee of the right to vote to the right to be elected, and from the introduction of quotas to the constitutional principle of parity, there have been instances of resistance—such as the "Juanitas" and "Manuelitas" phenomena. There have also been fake transgender candidacies in Oaxaca, or the countless cases of gender-based political violence against women. In short, Claudia Sheinbaum's nomination, election, and tenure as president are the result of her political talent, but also part of the legacy of the feminist struggle. "If she makes it, we all make" it is the synthesis of the long and winding path of resistance that women have faced in order to gain a place in the political sphere.

FROM HOPE TO DISENCHANTMENT: PERU

In Peru, the incorporation of women to the public life has been observed since the late 19th century, when women from different walks of life gathered in literary circles, art spaces, universities and in various workplaces. These were the spaces where women –especially those from upper-class and academic backgrounds– socialized and found some common concerns that allowed them to open themselves to the world. María Emma Mannarelli states that "they shared the concern of redefining a female morality based on work and dignified through education." (1999, p. 59). This, somehow, also entailed revolutionizing both the public and political spheres.

In the late 19th century, the so-called Generation of '70 was important, almost entirely integrated by women in academia with political concerns. Among them, the educators Teresa Gonzáles de Fanning and Elvira García y García stand out, as well as the writers Clorinda Matto de Turner, Carolina Freyre de Jaimes, Felisa Moscoso de Carvajal and Lastenia Larriva de Llona, and the feminist activists Zoila Aurora Cáceres Moreno and María Jesús Alvarado. For most of them, writing was the path that allowed them to get into politics. Yet, political power -dominated by men- rejected them. Their shared concern was the need to provide and ensure education for women and the right to vote.

By the first decade of the 20th century, it was impossible to keep denying women's presence in the public sphere, and in 1908, the President Leguía signed into law a bill that allowed women to enroll in university. Later on, in 1914, María Jesús Alvarado founded the first feminist organization in the country *Evolución Femenina* (Female Evolution), from which she sought to ensure secular education for women so as to shape mothers, and by doing so, to transform families. In 1924, Zoila Aurora Cáceres founded the group *Feminismo Peruano* (Peruvian Feminism), with which she envisioned a world that would ensure education and work for female workers. Cáceres's second concern was women's right to vote. She thought that women should be recognized as citizens with full rights and should participate in the political life of the country. Cáceres was the daughter of the national hero Andrés Avelino Cáceres and, from her privileged position, she fought for all women.

The first political parties that were formed in the first decades of the 20th century, such as the Partido Aprista Peruano (Peruvian Aprista Party), *la Unión Revolucionaria* (the Revolutionary Union), and *los de Izquierda* (the Left-wing Party), are the ones who -strategically- accepted women's participation among their ranks. Prominent figures include Magda Portal in the Peruvian Aprista Party and Yolanda Coco in the Revolutionary Union. It is the municipal space where women began to be elected as mayors. It is worth mentioning that these elections are not based on a popular mandate, they were designated by Assemblies of Notables, which are groups formed by representatives from diverse sectors of society, such as the Bar Association or the Chamber of Commerce. Their election took place during a period of democratization and political openness, specifically with the Law No. 10233, which fostered women's participation in Transitional Municipal Councils. Thus, at the national level, female mayors were already in office by 1945, including Dora Madueño de Bedoya in the city of Huancané (Puno) and Angélica Zambrano in Urubamba (Cusco) (OBANDO, 2024b). Additionally, Eva Morales in Arequipa (Arequipa) and Susana León in Matucana (Lima) were appointed deputy mayors.

In Lima, Teodolinda de Camuzzo was designated in La Victoria district, Ana Chiappe de Mariátegui in Barranco, Alicia Cox de Larco in Miraflores and Emma Billinghurst in Chorrillos. All of whom were designated in Transitional Municipal Councils in 1945.

With regard to women's suffrage in Peru, one can "identify a period from 1933, when Article 86 of that year's Constitution granted some women the qualified municipal vote in the midst of a heated debate in Constituent Congress (…), to 1955, when Law No. 12391 was enacted, reforming the Articles 34 and 86 of the Peruvian Constitution of 1933, and thus equalizing women's voting rights with those of men." (Bedoya, 2018, p. 96). Women's suffrage was the result of President Manuel Odría's political calculation, who sought to be reelected after two presidential terms: the first through a coup d'état and then a second constitutional one. His wife,

Doña María Delgado de Odría also influenced this decision since she found political clientelism to be a formula to bring the government closer to the underprivileged. The right to vote was granted to literate women who were over 21 years old, or married women over 18, through the Law No. 12391 enacted on September 7th, 1955. The exercise of this right just became possible on June 17th, 1956, when Peruvian women went to the polls for the first time in their national history. This historic moment was recorded by different media.

It was not until 1963 that the city of Lima had its first female mayor, Ana María Fernandini de Naranjo (OBANDO, 2024a); however, it was not through popular election. She was designated by the military government of General Nicolás Lindley López as the first woman to be at the helm of the municipality of Lima. Twenty years later, during Alan García's first presidential term, the first female State Ministers were appointed: Dr. Ilda Urizar Peroni as Minister of Health and teacher Mercedes Cabanillas as Minister of Education.

In the Peruvian electoral system, the gender quota (1997), which aims for female participation and gender equity in political representation, required a minimum participation of 25% of women on electoral lists for congressional, regional, and municipal elections. This percentage increased to 30% in the year 2000. The electoral system also has a Youth Quota that demands 20% of candidates under 19, exclusively for municipal elections. Finally, Peru has an Indigenous Quota: 15% regional and municipal.

That said, despite the existing regulations, the tendency until the late 20th century was to place women in positions with few possibilities of being elected due to cultural and sexist resistance (MONTALVO, 2009). By 2016, the National Office of Electoral Processes (ONPE) stated that the

gender quota had been insufficient for women to participate politically under equal conditions, and even less so to access popularly elected positions (GOB.PE, 2016).

It was not until the first decades of the 21st century that we found the first female chiefs of cabinet: Beatriz Merino (2003) during Alejandro Toledo administration, Rosario Fernández (2011) during Alan García's second presidential term, and Ana Jara (2014–2015) during the Ollanta Humala's presidential term. Finally, in 2020, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, we had the first gender-balanced government cabinet, Violeta Bermúdez's cabinet, during Francisco Sagasti's transitional government. These elections were the answer to a context of change, of cultural and political capitals shaped and aligned with a more equitable perspective of these political leaders.

It was only in 2020 that the Gender Parity and Alternation Law was enacted (Law 31030), seeking to ensure that the lists of candidates were composed of 50% women and 50% men, placed in an alternating order. The regulation applied to congressional, regional, and municipal elections aims for gender equality and a greater involvement of women. Therefore, this meant an increased political participation of women in different spheres.

On December 7th, 2022, Dina Ercilia Boluarte Zegarra, the then vice-president, assumed the presidency through presidential succession, right after the political and social crisis aggravated by Pedro Castillo's removal from office and detention due to an attempted coup. Boluarte called for a political truce and she made the commitment to setting up a government of national unity and to engaging in dialogue with all the sectors in order to fight corruption in state institutions.

At the same time, various regions in the country viewed Castillo's arrest as the accomplishment of traditional political parties which had sought to remove him from office from the very moment if his election. The protests broke out and started to spread across regions such as Apurímac, la Libertad, Ayacucho, Junín, Arequipa, Puno, Cusco and rallies towards Lima were announced. Boluarte administration's response was police repression, arbitrary detentions, and military control of different regions. The repression of the protests is one of the most serious episodes of mass human rights violations in the recent history of Peru. Fifty people and a police officer died and there were over 1,400 injured. Nowadays, the evidence points to the possible criminal liability of the former president, Dina Boluarte. Amnesty International report states that "the criminalization of the protest, the

restriction of the freedom of the press and the control over Civil Society Organizations, have reduced civic space and reflect an increase in authoritarian practices" (AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL, 2025).

The Boluarte administration failed to fulfill the international obligations Peru was bound to. The systems for the protection and defense of human rights were weakened. In light of the passage of legislation by Congress, such as Law No. 32107, which establishes a statute of limitations for crimes against humanity and war crimes committed before the Rome Statute entered into force in 2002, the executive branch did not take a clear stance in defense of human rights and international treaties.

With respect to women's rights, the Boluarte administration was characterized by major reversals: the weakening of the Ministry of Women and Vulnerable Populations (MIMP), as well as of the reproductive rights and the fight against violence against women, girls and adolescents. Concerning gender parity in her cabinet, in 2024, the Dina Boluarte administration turned Peru into the country with the lowest number of female Ministers in South America. Only two women were part of her cabinet: Úrsula Desilú León as the Minister of Foreign Trade and Tourism (Mincetur) and Ángela Hernández Cajo as the Minister of Women and Vulnerable Populations (MIMP). In the midst of a political and social crisis, Dina Boluarte was impeached and removed from office on October 10, 2025, on the grounds of permanent moral incapacity.

Keiko Sofía Fujimori Higuchi was the first elected female president in Peru as a result of the 2026 election. She is Alberto Fujimori's daughter and served during his term as First Lady. Her father's administration (1990-2000) is known for the Fujishock[1] (OBANDO, 2024c), the fight against terrorism, human rights violations and political corruption at the highest levels of government. He was tried and sentenced due to violations to Human Rights (DDHH[2]). Keiko Fujimori was elected congresswoman of the Republic with the highest vote count (2006-2011). She is the founder and leader of the political party *Fuerza Popular*. She ran for president of Peru four times: 2011, 2016,

1 In 1990, the economic crisis had become evident as the Peruvian State was not able to pay the external debt, there was hyperinflation, as well as a significant shortage of products, etc. In that context, Alberto Fujimori decided to implement some measures to contain it. Measures such as the removal of subsidies, the increase in the price of basic goods, both trade and price liberalization, to name a few. These actions were part of his economic strategy and made it possible to consolidate a neoliberal system at a high social cost.

2 Overall, we can identify some transgressions committed by the Fujimorism during the dictatorship: high levels of corruption and serious violations to Human Rights. The former is related to wrongdoings such as embezzlement and bribery. Regarding the latter, actions such as Barrios Altos and La Cantuta massacres, aggravated kidnappings against dissident groups, among others. In spite of being sentenced, a humanitarian pardon freed him from prison.

2021 and 2026. She has faced various accusations regarding corruption cases and was held in pretrial detention in connection with the “Cocktails case” which entailed money laundering allegations (Odebrecht). In 2026, she was elected president of Peru. Those elections brought about change: There is a shift from a unicameral to a bicameral system. The election results indicate that 27% of the Senate seats and 42% of the those in the Chamber of Deputies will be occupied by women. Furthermore, the regional and municipal elections will tale place on October 4th, 2026.

CONCLUSIONS

Women’s political leadership in the Americas and in the insular and continental Caribbean is a phenomenon which is constantly changing, both numerically and normatively, hence the need to document the transformations to avoid regressions. The 2026 electoral calendar marks presidential and legislative elections in Costa Rica, Colombia, Peru and Brazil and Parliamentary elections in Haiti. The echoes of struggles, resistance and changes are present in our history since the search for the guarantee of the right to vote and be elected: they are present in the implementation of affirmative measures reflected from the quota system to gender parity, and in the representation, measured by the number of women who have served in the presidency, congresses, or as state and local authorities.

There are at least three essential challenges to mention: Firstly, formal equality is necessary, but so is real equality. While there is some numerical advance, the diversity of women is not adequately represented. The forementioned makes intersectionality necessary as the key to the transformation of the relationship between men and women. Secondly, one of the limitations of the participation and representation of women in the political sphere is violence, which is neither gratuitous nor improvised, it is actually a deliberate act that seeks visibility and legitimacy of the group that has been in power historically. This violence exhibits performative acts of a power linked to patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity and such displays of power stage a type of authority and, at the same time, express great fragility.

Therefore, mechanisms such as the Registro National de Personas Sancionadas en Materia de Violencia Política contra las Mujeres en Razón de Género (National Registry of Persons Sanctioned in Matters of Political Violence Against Women Based on Gender) that belongs to INE in Mexico, promote not only the suppression of this type of behavior, but also its documentation as precedent. Learning about local good practices and extending them regionally can help to bridge the inequality gaps. Lastly, equality-focused education contributes to creating fairer societies built around democratic principles.

Having more gender-egalitarian socialization processes will enable us to build societies that incorporate historically disadvantaged groups so that they can occupy these decision-making spaces, power and influence, for instance: youths, LGBTQ+ people, economically and/or educationally disadvantaged individuals, among others. Acknowledging diversity and that each group has contested agendas that can be reconciled in favor of the majorities is to recognize that there is no democracy without women.

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