



*Time, Power, and Resistances in Latin America:
Narratives, Democracy, and Global Reconfigurations
(English Version)*

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Study on women in politics in Latin America

Estudio sobre la mujer en la política en América Latina

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ABSTRACT

Women's participation in politics is one of the key challenges for development today. Although women's empowerment is included in multilateral goals such as the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, much remains to be achieved. In this regard, Latin America presents a striking duality in women's political participation: it leads globally in parliamentary representation but has regressed in executive positions, with only one female president in 2025 compared to six in 2014. For this reason, the present research analyzes women's political participation in the region during the period 2014-2024. It examines existing structural obstacles, such as institutional biases that concentrate women in ministries associated with traditionally feminine roles, the lack of political will in predominantly conservative governments, and the region's entrenched patriarchal culture, among other factors. The study also analyzes regional legal instruments (such as the Belém do Pará Convention and the Quito Consensus), which establish important frameworks for women's advancement but lack effective implementation mechanisms due to their non-binding nature. To demonstrate the role of women in politics, the paper briefly highlights examples of women in emblematic leadership and diplomatic positions with undeniable results. The conclusion reveals a paradox in the region between normative achievements and their real implementation, as a result of persistent structural tensions. This study seeks to raise awareness about the role of women in politics and contribute to their empowerment.

Keywords: Women's Political Participation; Gender Equality; Latin America; Institutional Barriers; Empowerment.

RESUMEN

La participación de la mujer en la política constituye uno de los desafíos para el desarrollo en la actualidad. A pesar de que el empoderamiento femenino está incluido dentro de metas multilaterales como la agenda 2030 y los ODS, aún falta mucho por materializar. En este sentido, América Latina presenta una dualidad significativa en la participación política femenina: lidera globalmente en representación parlamentaria pero evidencia un retroceso en cargos ejecutivos con solo una presidenta en 2025 frente a seis en 2014. Debido a esto, la presente investigación analiza la participación política de las mujeres en la región durante el 2014-2024. Para lo cual estudia los obstáculos estructurales existentes como los sesgos institucionales que concentran a mujeres en ministerios asociados a su sexo, la poca voluntad política de los gobiernos fundamentalmente conservadores, la cultura patriarcal de la región entre otros factores. De igual forma se analizan los instrumentos jurídicos regionales (Convención de Belém do Pará, Consenso de Quito) los cuales establecen marcos importantes en el adelanto para las

mujeres pero carecen de mecanismos para su verdadera implementación al no tener carácter vinculante. Para demostrar el papel de las mujeres en la política se valoran brevemente ejemplos de féminas en liderazgos emblemáticos y diplomáticas con resultados innegables. El cierre de la investigación revela una paradoja en la región entre logros normativos y la real implementación de estos, resultado de las tensiones estructurales existentes. Este estudio busca concientizar sobre el papel de las mujeres en la política y aportar al empoderamiento de estas.

Palabras clave: Participación Política de las Mujeres; Igualdad de Género; América Latina; Barreras Institucionales; Empoderamiento.

INTRODUCTION

Women's participation in different spheres of society has undoubtedly been an issue since the dawn of human development. Since they emerged as solely maternal figures incapable of making decisions, women have been discouraged from participating in social spheres. However, it has been shown that the female perspective is highly useful across a range of areas where it is applied. In this sense, the Latin American region is characterized by a fundamental paradox in terms of women's political participation. While it leads globally in parliamentary representation, there is evidence of persistent structural barriers that limit women's real access to decision-making spaces.

This issue has been studied by various researchers worldwide, notably Añazco (2018) and Lucero (2012). However, this research tends to focus on the historical role women have played in politics, analyzing their main challenges or discussing gender equality from an international law perspective, without emphasizing women's participation in politics.

Due to this academic gap, this research analyzes women's participation in politics in Latin America. To this end, the following specific objectives were established: to analyze the obstacles women face to political participation in the region; to analyze the regional regulatory framework on women's emancipation and the response of states to these obstacles; and to assess examples of women in politics who demonstrate the importance of the female perspective.

The research required the application of the methods and techniques most suited to its characteristics, with an emphasis on analysis-synthesis in the preparation of conclusions: the historical-logical method to analyze the role that women have played in politics and the main obstacles they face; the inductive-deductive method to reach conclusions related to the generalities that emerged from the research process based on the systematization of the criteria of the authors consulted; as well as documentary analysis and review of the sources gathered, which made it possible to search for information and verify the importance and necessity of the research. The data obtained were generalized using logical scientific knowledge procedures. This work can contribute to greater awareness of the importance of women's roles in diplomacy in the region, demonstrating that the inclusion of women in politics is not only a moral and ethical imperative but also a vital component for achieving sustainable and fair development.

DEVELOPMENT

Political violence against women is one of the most serious and widespread obstacles in the region. It manifests itself through threats, physical and digital harassment, misogynistic defamation, and attacks on the physical integrity of female candidates and elected officials.

In the region, six countries (Bolivia, Argentina, Mexico, Paraguay, El Salvador, and Honduras) have reformed their laws to recognize and punish this type of violence. However, most cases go unpunished due to a lack of effective protection protocols, the cultural normalization of violence due to the perception of politics as a male space, which leads to the justification of attacks to discourage female participation, and digital harassment, including smear campaigns on social media, a form of violence that is not classified in most legislation.

There are institutional barriers from political parties that reproduce patriarchal dynamics. In this sense, although 18 countries have quota or parity laws, parties evade compliance through legal appeals or symbolic appointments. In addition, female candidates receive fewer campaign resources than their male colleagues, limiting their visibility and competitiveness.

It is also important to understand that governments are driving an alleged setback in gender rights. In Argentina, for example, female representation in cabinets fell to 18 % after the change of government in 2023. In other countries, religious sectors are pushing to eliminate parity laws, as happened in Guatemala in 2024. The impeachment of Dilma Rousseff demonstrated how women's achievements can be abruptly reversed.

It is therefore clear that the obstacles to women's political participation in Latin America are systemic, interconnected, and reinforced by deep-rooted patriarchal structures.

Regional Regulatory Framework on Women's Political Participation in Latin America

The Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, organized by ECLAC in coordination with UN Women, is the region's main intergovernmental forum on women's rights and gender equality. However, its impact on women's actual political participation remains limited, despite its recognition as a regional normative space, due to multiple factors. The Conference has created instruments such as the Regional Gender Agenda, which has guided public policies on equality since 1977. Agreements such as the Quito Consensus (2007) and the Buenos Aires Commitment (2022) have influenced national laws on parity and care. Similarly, Advisory Opinion 31/2025 of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, which recognizes the right to care as a human right, was influenced by these agreements.

However, these commitments are political declarations, not legally binding treaties. Countries are not subject to sanctions for non-compliance, which reduces the pressure to implement concrete changes. For example, although 16 countries have made regulatory progress in care, only 8 have passed specific laws.

There are no mandatory accountability systems or uniform indicators to measure progress. The Conference's Executive Committee holds only periodic follow-up meetings, and its recommendations are not binding. Another shortcoming is the lack of depth of the topics, as the conferences address issues such as climate change, education, and the economy. However, political participation is not always a priority. For example, the 16th Conference, held in August 2025, focused on the care society, leaving political representation in the background.

Although ECLAC's Regional Conference on Women is a key policy pillar for gender equality in Latin America, its impact on political participation remains weak due to a lack of enforceability, insufficient resources, and structural resistance. To fulfill its potential, it must evolve from a space for dialogue to one for binding action, with concrete goals and enforcement mechanisms. The recent decision to rename it the "Regional Conference on Women" (2025) symbolizes

progress, but it will only translate into real change with sustained political will.

It is important to highlight the Quito Consensus, adopted at the 10th Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean in 2007, which represents a political commitment signed by 24 countries to advance gender equality. It focuses on two strategic areas: gender parity in political participation at all levels of decision-making, and the recognition of women's unpaid work and the promotion of quality jobs.

Although some of its commitments are ambitious, such as the implementation of quotas and parity, preventing political and administrative harassment against women in public office, equalizing labor rights for domestic workers, and eliminating wage gaps, the truth is that the Consensus is a political declaration, not an international treaty. Its commitments depend on governments' will, which explains their uneven implementation. Progress reports are presented every three years at Regional Conferences, but there are no sanctions for non-compliance.

Intersectionality is not addressed in the Consensus, even since its inception, as the negotiation of the agreement mainly involved governments and urban NGOs, with limited participation by indigenous women leaders. This explains why issues such as prior consultation for extractive projects affecting indigenous territories were omitted from the text. During the negotiation process, important issues were also overlooked in the search for consensus, such as the Chilean delegation's blocking of the explicit inclusion of women's sexual rights.

The Quito Consensus was visionary for its time in proposing political parity and economic rights, but its impact is limited by a lack of attention to intersectionality and conservative resistance. For it to contribute to real empowerment, it must evolve into an enforceable instrument with allocated resources and a focus on marginalized women.

On the other hand, the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women, adopted in 1994 under the auspices of the Organization of The American States (OAS) is the first binding international treaty to recognize violence against women as a violation of human rights and a manifestation of historically unequal power relations. It defines gender-based violence as "any action or conduct based on gender that causes death, harm, or physical, sexual, or psychological suffering, both in the public and private spheres" (Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women, 1994, Art. 1). It establishes specific obligations for States, including adopting legislative and policy measures to prevent, punish, and eradicate violence, guaranteeing access to effective judicial and judicial resources and comprehensive protection, and modifying sociocultural patterns that perpetuate inequality.

However, the Convention lacks specificity at present. For example, although Article 2 recognizes physical, sexual, and psychological violence, it does not explicitly mention modern forms such as digital political violence or economic violence, which makes it difficult to prosecute. Similarly, the Convention does not establish concrete metrics for evaluating state "due diligence" (Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women, 1994, Article 7), and countries such as Guatemala and Honduras lack standardized systems for measuring compliance, which allows for impunity.

Its Follow-up Mechanism (MESECVI), created in 2004, lacks sanctioning powers. Its recommendations are non-binding, and national reports depend on each government's political

will. In this regard, in 2025, only 18 of 32 countries submitted complete reports on political violence. In addition, it operates with voluntary funding, which limits its technical capacity to audit countries.

Although Article 4 recognizes the right to “participate in public affairs,” the Convention does not expressly mention harassment against female candidates or elected officials. This allows cases such as sexist defamation or financial sabotage of women’s campaigns to go unpunished. Another limitation is that the measures focus on punishing violence that has already occurred, but do not oblige states to implement parity quotas or mandatory training for judges on gender perspectives.

The Convention was a historic milestone, but its impact on women’s political empowerment remains limited due to regulatory deficiencies, lack of political will, and gaps in its implementation. To fulfill its purpose, it must evolve into an intersectional, enforceable instrument adapted to new forms of political violence. As long as these limitations persist, women’s full access to spaces of power in Latin America will remain an unfulfilled promise.

In general, these mechanisms focus on symbolic participation by women rather than addressing the root causes of inequality or ensuring the effectiveness of their roles in the processes. In this sense, women’s participation in delegations related to peace and security processes may be quantitative, leaving them unable to influence key decisions. Similarly, most of these initiatives do not always integrate an intersectional approach that considers other factors, such as race, class, ethnicity, and disability, among others, that affect women differently when it comes to their presence in the political sphere. In turn, most programs depend on external funding, which makes them vulnerable to changes in donor priorities.

For their part, the states in the region, although they have signed and committed to these initiatives, lack the real political will to implement them. Many have not even ratified international human rights agreements, let alone specifically women’s rights agreements. In this regard, for a rule of public international law to be effective in domestic law, concrete legislative measures are required; mere moral commitments are insufficient. This is one of the main challenges in implementing international initiatives and instruments in practice.

In other cases, some countries implement only symbolic aspects of resolutions, avoiding structural changes that challenge the status quo. In government resource allocation, efforts for gender equality are displaced by priorities such as economic development and technology. Therefore, the resources allocated to this purpose are often marginal compared to those allocated to other areas of funding. At the same time, the rise of conservatism has led to a setback in the progress made in gender equality in politics and constitutes an obstacle to the full development of women’s rights.

Women Leaders in Negotiations in Latin America (2000-2025)

The region has enduring examples of women with significant political histories

One example is Michelle Bachelet, who, as former president of Chile (2006-2010, 2014-2018) and former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, participated in diplomatic support for the peace process between the Colombian government and the FARC (2012-2016). During the process, she promoted the inclusion of women at the negotiating table and the incorporation of a gender perspective into the agreements. Her leadership helped ensure that the final agreement addressed issues such as sexual violence and victims’ rights. Because of this activism, she faced

resistance from conservative sectors that questioned the “gender ideology” in the agreement. Despite this, her intervention was key to Colombia adopting the world’s first peace agreement with a gender focus.

The armed conflict in Colombia led to the active participation of other women, such as María Emma Mejía, former Colombian foreign minister (1996-1997) and representative to the UN. She participated in the peace negotiations as part of the government team. In this capacity, she promoted women’s participation in local dialogues and the inclusion of victims in those discussions. Her work facilitated the creation of the Gender Subcommission, which ensured that the agreements included measures against sexual violence. She was also criticized by political sectors, which argued that the inclusion of gender issues diverted attention from the process.

In relation to armed conflicts, anthropologist and writer Rita Segato stands out. She advised on peace processes in Guatemala and Colombia on structural violence and gender. In this regard, she developed conceptual frameworks for understanding violence against women in armed conflicts. Her work influenced the inclusion of gender crimes in the Guatemalan peace agreements. She faced skepticism from negotiators who downplayed the anthropological approach. However, her persistence led to the recognition of patriarchal violence as a central axis of the conflicts.

Other indigenous and Afro-descendant women leaders played a key role in environmental and territorial negotiations. Examples include Bertha Cáceres, who led the resistance against dams and negotiated with companies and the government in Honduras until her assassination in 2016, and Patricia Gualinga in Ecuador, who negotiated with the government to protect Amazonian territories from oil exploitation. Both included demands for indigenous and environmental rights in national and international agendas, even though many processes were ignored or sabotaged by economic interests.

These women demonstrated that female participation in negotiations contributes to sustainability and a focus on human rights. If the gender of politicians really matters, having more women in power has far-reaching implications for policy design, from another perspective. Their participation in politics brings gender-specific issues to the fore and facilitates inclusion in all social actions.

CONCLUSIONS

The Latin American region has an emancipatory regulatory framework, but it is constrained by significant limitations that prevent women’s full political participation.

The existing obstacles are institutional, structural, and cultural, requiring concrete measures to dismantle them.

The states that have signed the set of covenants and treaties that enshrine human rights must implement policies to comply with their provisions, primarily in the political sphere, in accordance with the principles of public international law.

It is imperative to raise awareness that human beings have the same rights, that societies can only be built with the unity of men and women on the basis that everyone deserves the same opportunities without distinction of any kind, much less gender.

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