

# Democratization



Year 3, Issue 14

The construction of political participation  
of women in Venezuela

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Politics and women

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fictitious inclusion, actual exclusion

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Caracas.

Edited by Instituto FORMA

Gloria Lizárraga de Capriles

*In memoriam*

# Introduction

This issue, consecrated to women, is dedicated to the memory of a Venezuelan politician who invested her life to public service with generosity and righteousness. This person is Gloria Lizárraga de Capriles, who left this world on March 31st, 2021.

Gloria Capriles, as she was popularly known, was the first woman mayor of the Baruta municipality. She was elected in the country's first regional elections in 1989. Her political career began when she was just a teenager. At the age of 14, she began her service at COPEI and was a pioneer in the development of local social and economic policies. She was a Social Christian who served the development of democracy and decentralization. Those who knew her in the exercise of her power remember her righteousness, her sharpness, her firmness and her good humor. Without a doubt, this last characteristic is a necessary virtue when you have government responsibilities. She understood politics as the highest form of charity and, until the end of her days, she bore witness to it. Seeing humble baruteños who came to reciprocate her dedication and her affection in her last goodbye was a moving experience. Without a doubt, Gloria knew how to give life to the preferential option of the poor and she sowed wealth in many hearts.

Among the countless aspects that we could highlight of her political life, we would also like to refer to the elegance and efficiency with which she managed to match her political vocation and family life. She was a vessel of conciliation in times when it was common for women to give up their professional careers to tend to their families. Gloria lived with sportsmanship in both fields and

was what today is called "icebreaker" because she set the path for later generations. She advanced in politics while caring for a large family of seven children, and, not without effort, she managed to rise above both challenges. For this reason, we dedicate this issue to her memory and we hope that it will be a reference and inspiration for all Venezuelans who dedicate themselves to the public with the hope of building a better country.

This issue seeks to dive into the different contexts, situations and roles that Venezuelan women have taken on, in order to give visibility to what we have achieved and the road we still have ahead to achieve justice. The five articles presented illustrate the journey of women as political actors, the disparity that exists between men and women in areas such as politics and academia, and violence against women in different areas of public life.

Firstly, *The construction of political participation of women in Venezuela*, written by Luis Fernando Castillo Herrera, overviews the political demands of Venezuelan women, with special emphasis on their fight towards earning the right to vote.

Secondly, in the essay *Politics and women*, Paola Bautista de Alemán reflects, from her experience, upon the participation of women in politics from a specific context to broaden the debate on the challenges faced by women who want to dedicate themselves to public life in Venezuela.

The third article in this edition is a piece by the journalist Luz Mely Reyes titled *The power of violence against women: fictitious inclusion, actual exclusion*. This article is a compilation of different figures that show how power and society perpetrate certain behaviors that violate women. This article intends to put into perspective behaviors that threaten real forms of inclusion.

The fourth article presents the testimony of Liz Carolina Jaramillo in an essay titled *Challenges of political participation: my experience*. In this written testimony, the author reflects first-hand on her path towards being elected as a member of the National Assembly, raising questions and suggesting how to build more just, peaceful and egalitarian societies.

Finally, in the article *Venezolanas Investigan: Why was it created and who is part of it?*, Adriana Boersner Herrera delves into the reasons that led her and her team to create the network of women called *Venezolanas Investigan*. This network was born to highlight and praise the work that Venezuelan women have been doing in different areas of public life.

# The construction of political participation of women in Venezuela

Luis Fernando Castillo Herrera

The 1935-1945 decade not only saw the rise of party formation and its electoral performance; it also set the stage for the struggle towards female suffrage, an aspiration fully materialized in 1947. Evoking such scenario entails recognizing the actual beginnings of the political demands of women in our country. It also broadens the debate around the rights built by the hand of each of the females who had to confront a world contrary to their demands. Let us review some of the insights developed in the course of the national discussion on the right to vote for women in Venezuela, a core element in understanding the construction of female political participation in Venezuela.

## **Venezuelan women and the epic of suffrage**

In the course of the 19th century, the academic José Gil Fortul became a true pioneer by establishing important observations regarding the characteristics of civil laws and the disadvantageous situation of women in the Venezuelan legal system: “[women] (...) could be a witness for the verification of a crime and the

determination of the guilty. However, their participation in matters of political nature constituted a chimera”<sup>1</sup>.

However, it was only during the period of 1935-1945 when the discussion became significant, particularly during the government of Isaías Medina Angarita. A letter sent by a group of women on December 30, 1935, addressed to General Eleazar López Contreras can be considered a first stepping stone. They did not request the right to vote, however, they did contemplate some elements linked to the vindication of women, among them, demanding to be hired in factories and workshops.

Such a novel request was not considered in the February Program<sup>2</sup>, which would have really demonstrated a true political and social openness in General López Contreras’s early government. This was not the only female intervention in the post-Gómez era. Two groups were established in less than a year: the *Agrupación Cultural Femenina* (1935) and the *Asociación Venezolana de Mujeres* (1936). Their main objective was the protection of the mother and the child and not so much the claims of civil and political rights<sup>3</sup>.

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1 Own translation from Jaime Ybarra, “José Gil Fortoul: defensor de los derechos políticos de la mujer”. En Yuleida Artigas Dugarte, Jean Carlos Brizuela, José Alberto Olivar (coordinadores), *La Venezuela perenne. Ensayos sobre aportes de venezolanos en dos siglos*, (Caracas: Universidad Pedagógica Experimental Libertador, 2014): 137-150, 142.

2 Likely the first “Plan País”, a reorganization project which dedicated itself to rethinking the nation while holding in consideration the demands of the 20th century. Basically, the February Program presented by Eleazar López Contreras in 1936 was a diagnosis of the country, an evaluation in order to offer solutions in those areas which demanded immediate action.

3 Carolina Coddetta, *Mujer y participación política en Venezuela* (Caracas: Comala.com, 2001): 99.



As early as 1936, the *Agrupación Cultural Femenina* overwhelmingly exposed the most urgent requests for Venezuelan women through its main spokesperson, Mercedes Fermín:

Free elections by 1936: that is the slogan of the *Agrupación Cultural Femenina*, interpreting popular sentiment. For them we will fight, against all rising contingencies. The Venezuelan woman, aware of her duty, asks [to vote] to be able to build our Homeland, crushed by the beasts and stooges of servility and barbarism<sup>4</sup>.

The efforts of those organizations reaped notable successes when achieving the reform of the Civil Code in 1942. The event greatly inspired the already large group. Through the organization *Acción Femenina*, they lined up towards achieving the vote, but not before staging intense parliamentary debates in the Senate and being harshly criticized by even well-known academic figures.

High sounding and of historical value, May 8 of 1943 should be remembered as the day a representation of several ladies attended the Senate Chamber in a special session to propose their concepts and criteria regarding the importance of women's suffrage for the democratic and political development of the country. The proposal consisted of six arguments that supported the central petition: to reform numeral 14 of article 32 of the Constitution, which specifically established<sup>5</sup> the legal impossibility of women to exercise the right to vote:

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4 Own translation from Mercedes Fermín, "La mujer venezolana y la disolución del congreso", 1936. En *Pensamiento Político Venezolano del Siglo XX*, Ediciones del Congreso de la República, n° 14, Tomo VII, Volumen I (1985): 567-570.

5 The aforementioned article literally reflected the reservation of suffrage only for male Venezuelans: Own translation of number 14, article 32 of the Constitution of the United States of Venezuela of 1936: "The right to vote, and, consequently, male Venezuelans, over twenty-one years, who

Such refusal, by restricting their civic responsibility, has a direct impact on national life, since by preventing them from exercising the most transcendental of political rights, it also inhibits them from the performance of certain positions in which they could usefully act, as they do since long ago in other countries<sup>6</sup>.

Venezuela was clearly lagging in comparison with other nations of the Southern Cone, which had already approved the female vote. Mexico, Peru, Brazil, Ecuador and Uruguay were among those nations. Necessarily, national political progress had to point in an unavoidable way towards the consummation of suffrage for women if it really wanted to head towards the transformations that were progressively taking shape all around.

In the heat of debates, Senator Jóvito Villalba offered a significant intervention supporting the motion made days before by the group of ladies. According to the interpretation of the subtle politician, the country was located in a totally different scenario from the one staged in 1936, and, consequently, the Constitution in force [1943] was not congruent with the political-social context, in addition to presenting itself as an insurmountable wall in the face of requests from different sectors, especially women.

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know how to read and write and who are not subject to interdiction or criminal conviction involving political disqualification, are eligible to elect and be elected, with no restrictions other than those established in this Constitution, and those derived from special conditions of competence or capacity that the laws require for the exercise of certain positions”.

- 6 Own translation from Ana Julia Rojas, Ada Pérez Guevara et al., “Representación de damas ante la Cámara de Diputados, pidiendo se asuma el estudio del derecho al sufragio para la mujer venezolana”, 1943. In *Pensamiento Político Venezolano del Siglo XX*, Caracas. Ediciones del Congreso de la República, n° 35, IX, Volume XIX, 1985, pp. 301-303; p. 302.

Villalba stated that the current winds, different from those at the end of the dictatorship, forced a change of thought: "The time has passed when some would consider *Gomecistas* all those who disagreed with their ideas, and others would consider all dissenters communists. That moment has passed"<sup>7</sup>. From the perspective of Senator Villalba, the different actors participated openly and without fear; communists, liberals and conservatives are part of the political universe, their voices have resonance. However, the female voice continued to be eclipsed; their action still remained inert by the precepts of an already fossilized Magna Carta.

The senator closed his speech by calling for the need for constitutional reform, driven primarily by the initial courage of Venezuelan women:

I consider it a happy omen for the cause of constitutional reform that its first announcement, in the chamber of the Venezuelan Senate, comes through the pure hands and the noble voice of our women. Our women are the godmothers of the constitutional reform, the godmothers and the mothers of our democracy<sup>8</sup>.

Ada Pérez Guevara's words could also be brought to mind. As one of the main promoters of the female vote in Venezuela, she considered it a decisive factor in the realization of a true and full democracy. To the extent that women had the opportunities and were legally allowed to abandon that hateful position of inferiority where she had been placed, they would be able to

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7 Own translation from Jovito Villalba, "Intervención del senador Jovito Villalba en relación al voto femenino", 1943. In *Pensamiento Político Venezolano del Siglo XX*, Caracas. Ediciones del Congreso de la República, N° 35, IX, volumen XIX, 1985, pp. 305-310; p. 308.

8 Ibidem, p. 309.

effectively contribute to the nation-building process, as Pérez Guevara, quoted by Huggins Castañeda, expressed it:

In no case can true and comprehensive democracy be achieved until political equality is decided between Venezuelan men and women, different in sex, but similar, because we are all human. If this does not happen, democracy will be unstable, elusive, intangible<sup>9</sup>.

The session in the Senate on May 19, 1943, would show two sides of the same coin, two interpretations around the female vote. The interventions of Senators Andrés Eloy Blanco and Carlos Ramírez Mac-Gregor demonstrated the existing duality in the face of the issue: acceptance and support for the constitutional reform on the one hand, while the other extreme the thesis was met with resistance, rather suggesting following a natural course without constraints and premature results. In this order, Eloy Blanco, in the context of World War II, stated that:

The situation of the world in struggle is a warning. The suffrage of women must come before peace. Suffrage and other conquests, as the Commission's Report says very well. Peace must be a peace of the peoples; it must be an hour of repairs. One of those reparations we owe to a woman; every day she shows us her self-improvement (...) <sup>10</sup>.

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9 Own translation from Magally Huggins Castañeda, "Re-escribiendo la historia: las venezolanas y su lucha por los derechos políticos", *Revista venezolana de estudios de la mujer*, Caracas, 2010, n° 34, volume 15, Jan-July, 2010, pp. 163-190; p. 177.

10 Own translation from Andrés Eloy Blanco, Carlos Ramírez Mac-Gregor "Informe de la comisión permanente de Relaciones Interiores de la Cámara de Diputados respecto a las sugerencias de un grupo de damas sobre el voto femenino", 1943. In *Pensamiento Político Venezolano del Siglo XX*, Ediciones del Congreso de la República, N° 35, IX, volume XIX (1985): 341-349.

For his part, Ramírez Mac-Gregor, who at no time seems to have doubted his statements even in the presence of the group of ladies that filled the legislative precinct, defended two main arguments. First, any significant change had to wait for the culmination of the war, openly contradicting the criteria of Andrés Eloy Blanco. Secondly, that his assessment implied delaying but not denying women the right to vote. Ramírez Mac-Gregor considered that the vindication of women should be developed in prudent time:

If women cannot be separated from the home, without the consent of her husband, how can she be granted the right to vote? If our Civil Code consecrates this still feudal principle, I do not understand how it can fit within that interpretation that women can vote (...) The experience of other peoples teaches us that this process of vindication of women must, like any process, maintain a rhythm, otherwise it is premature<sup>11</sup>.

The horizon seemed opaque and uncertain. There was a notable group of senators who bet on the female vote, however, there was another representation opposed to it. For its part, the commission in charge of analyzing the request for the female vote, considered the issue at the time as a problem of a political nature and not only a legislative one. It was not exclusively a matter of reforming the Constitution, but of interpreting and discerning around the “political maturity” of Venezuelan women in the 1940s.

Thus, the permanent commission of internal relations of the Senate chamber concluded on June 17, 1943, to delay the issue of

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11 Ibidem, p. 353.

constitutional reform as well as postponing granting the right to women:

(...) The Commission considers that it would be inoperative to establish from now on, as requested, a Special Commission to study the possibility of the aforementioned reform, since it could not be carried out immediately but only when the country is presented with the need to carry it out by the competent organs, which will be the only truly opportune moment to judge the political capacity of Venezuelan women and recognize or not their right to vote<sup>12</sup>.

When exactly one year had elapsed since the request was made in 1943, the debate was brought again upon the Senate Chamber. The group of ladies inevitably reaffirmed their arguments. The revision of numeral 14 of article 32 of the Constitution had been promised, and the activists would not allow the issue to dissipate in eternal discussions under the roof of the Senate.

After the reform of the Civil Code, obtaining the vote had become a crusade. That factor would constitute a true example of progress. Gender parity, at the time of going to the electoral polls, could no longer be a chimera:

(...) Venezuelan women today consider that the only political right that they lack –that is, to vote– unjustifiably inhibits and humiliates them, placing them, globally, before all the

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12 Own translation from Pedro Silva Carranza, Manuel Gimón Intriago, "Informe de la Comisión permanente de Relaciones interiores de la Cámara del Senado sobre el voto femenino, sesión del 17 de junio de 1943", 1943. In *Pensamiento Político Venezolano del Siglo XX*, Ediciones del Congreso de la República, N° 35, IX, volumen XIX (1985): 311-313.

nations of the civilized world, among the minors, illiterate, interdicted or criminally convicted<sup>13</sup>.

This is how female representation expressed itself before the Senate Chamber on April 18, 1944. That statement gave birth to a new discussion, which would finally converge in the promulgation of the constitutional reform of May 5, 1945, which contemplated the vote of women to elect councilors. Undoubtedly it was a significant achievement. However, a closer reading shows us, firstly, that General Medina's government refused the public the right to a universal, direct and secret vote, and, secondly, that women were once again diminished since their electoral participation was reduced to the municipal line. Perhaps on account of the premise that Senator Ramírez Mac-Gregor outlined in 1943.

The events that occurred after October 18, 1945, the overthrow of Isaías Medina Angarita, and the first democratic exercise in Venezuela, would end up setting the stage for the consecration of unrestricted voting for women in our country.

## **The role of democracy**

The significant advances in the field of political rights for women constitute a remarkable achievement of Venezuelan democracy. Starting in 1958, just when the last dictatorship of the 20th century closed its dark doors<sup>14</sup>, the country would head towards the consecration of a series of demands, public policies

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13 Ana Julia Rojas, María Teresa de Rolando et al., "Debate en la Cámara del Senado en torno al voto femenino, sesión del 8 de mayo de 1944", 1944. In *Pensamiento Político Venezolano del Siglo XX*, Ediciones del Congreso de la República, N° 35, IX, volumen XIX (1985): 315-318.

14 I refer to the military dictatorship of Marcos Pérez Jiménez, who ruled Venezuela from 1953 to 1958, right after the 1948-1952 period when a

and the reconstruction of the democratic foundations laid with the elections of December 14, 1947, when Rómulo Gallegos was elected by Venezuelans of legal age, an undoubtedly unprecedented event in the country. The consecration of the female vote in national elections must be seen as one of the most precious assets achieved by democracy.

According to the Venezuelan historian Manuel Caballero, democracy was definitely marked mainly by the women who took the streets<sup>15</sup>, meaning women who became an active part of building the country, who took part in decision-making and participated in core actions of the republican project. "Put simply, women decided to look for their own sustenance in the street and to equate themselves to men, that is, to cease being dependent"<sup>16</sup>. Naturally, for this to come to fruition, an ideal political panorama was essential in the first place and, secondly, the persistence of the organization of women who did not abandon the gained terrain during the 1940s. As we appreciate the path traveled, we find encouraging results.

The years marked by the democratic project allowed participation and inclusion, reflected in the favorable rates, palpable in different spaces, but mainly in educational settings: "In 1961 the proportion of girls in high schools barely reached 38.6% of enrollment, however, in 1975 the proportion was reversed, out

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Military Junta and a Government Junta jointly administered power after the coup d'état against President Rómulo Gallegos.

15 Manuel Caballero, "El siglo XX venezolano conversado con Manuel Caballero" in: Asdrúbal Baptista (coord.) *Venezuela siglo XX, visiones y testimonio*, Fundación Polar, Tomo III (2000): 458.

16 Idem. Own translation.



of a student population of 660,200, 52.6% were women, while in 1989 the figure reached 54.6%”<sup>17</sup>.

Political spaces would also show a marked distance between the “years of silence” and democratic determination. Women became important actors in the partisan debate and in the formulation of the legal body focused on creating better conditions, plurality and equity. Although it is true that most of the women’s organizations formed in the 1940s and 1950s ended up merging into the political parties themselves, it is important to point out the birth of new forms of participation, unions, associations and movements that were inspired by the context of women’s liberation of the 60s from all over the world. The country witnessed the birth of the Ministry for the Participation of Women in Development, predecessor of the Ministry of the Family. Likewise, the Ministry of State for the Promotion of Women gave way to the creation of the National Council for Women in 1992, classes and even master’s degrees dedicated to the study of the problems of inclusion and rights not granted to this important sector of the society.

The political participation of women in Venezuela constituted an effort propelled by female Venezuelan themselves. When they understood that the death of Juan Vicente Gómez was a propitious space for a very important national transformation, they began travelling the path that would lead to consecrating the vote, followed by new forms of participation. However, this scenario is not sustainable without democracy, without a real and effective system that allows the guarantees and rights already acquired to have validity. The current Venezuela does not have the sufficient (and necessary) institutional apparatus to guarantee the free

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17 Own translation from Inés Quintero, “Itinerarios de la mujer o el 50 por ciento que se hace mitad” in: Asdrúbal Baptista (coord.) *Venezuela siglo XX, visiones y testimonio*, Fundación Polar, Tomo III (2000): 262.

participation of its citizens, which implies a deconstruction of the historical and democratic legacy of our past.

# Politics and women

Paola Bautista de Alemán

Joyce Marie Mushaben is an American academic who has dedicated her intellectual life to gender studies. In “*Becoming Chancellor: Angela Merkel and the Berlin Republic*”<sup>1</sup> she offers a comprehensive analysis of the leadership of the woman who has contributed the most to Western politics in recent decades. It is an extraordinary book. Perhaps one of the most interesting aspects of this publication is its dedication. The author dedicates her efforts to her late husband, Harry F. Few, “who had a hard time understanding why his wife insisted that the words «same» and «equal» are not synonyms, and that sometimes we actually need to be treated «differently» to achieve equality when it comes to reconciling family and career”.

I feel identified with this testimony. I am a wife, a mother, a politician and a student of political science. I have formed a family and have developed myself professionally in Venezuela, in a particularly complex environment. Like Professor Mushaben, I have experienced how this desired conciliation is possible when personal effort comes together with institutional structures that are open to this reality and with the solidarity of those around us. This essay is a reflection on the participation of women in politics. I do not pretend to offer universal solutions. These are approaches that arise in a specific context and seek to contribute

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1 Joyce Mushaben, *Becoming Madam Chancellor: Angela Merkel and the Berlin Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

to the debate. *Politics and women* is divided into four parts. Firstly, we will overview some ideas on philosophical anthropology; next, keys on the meaning of the political vocation; then, some considerations on the challenges we face and, to finalize, some tools to take them on.

## Back to anthropology

I will begin by sharing some ideas on philosophical anthropology. I have decided to start here because I understand that politics must be at the service of others and, in this sense, it is necessary to better know the subject-object of political efforts. Reflecting on the human person, our social dimension, our sexual nature, our abilities, the purpose of exercising them and reaching the full scope of our capacities is essential to deepen the participation of women in politics. I consider that this honest purpose of discovering our anthropological dimension is perhaps the best antidote against ideological vices that can sometimes limit debate and consensus<sup>2</sup>. The subject is extensive and I will not

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2 In “Reactionary feminism”, Mary Harrington distinguishes feminisms according to their ideological inclination: right and left. She finds that both are limited because they do not consider the anthropological dimension of the human person. The author explains: “A reactionary feminism seeks to honor women by accepting as givens the things that make us human: our bodies and our relationships. It asks how we might frame our obligations justly, between the sexes, in the interest of the common good. Women must negotiate new social and economic conditions, not in a spirit of zero-sum conflict with men, but alongside our friends, husbands, fathers, brothers, and sons. The aim is not to return to some imagined perfect past, but to reach a future unshackled from the dystopian pursuit of progress. The only escape from a nightmare of atomization and war between the sexes is the recognition that we are embodied creatures, and that interdependence is not oppression but the very thing that makes us human”. Taken from: <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2021/06/reactionary-feminism>

exhaust it in this section. But I will offer a few notes to encourage curiosity and intellectual appetite.

These issues have been pondered about since ancient times and from different perspectives. At the risk of simplifying the following approaches and understanding that between the two there is a wide spectrum of shades of gray, I can distinguish between two types: (i) those that propose that we are a social construct without a natural substrate and (ii) those that recognize the existence of an intrinsic nature which includes a social dimension that conditions it but that does not determine it. The latter strives to acknowledge our anthropological dimension, as well as a fundamental issue: that we are all bearers of a dignity given to us by the mere fact of existing and, in this sense, we are above any material good.

Considering, then, that we have a nature that deserves to be explored, I will dwell on what Thomas Aquinas called “powers of the human”. Powers of the human are “the proximate principle of the soul’s operation”. In addition to having dignity, we possess three qualities that feed our spirit and can pave the way for the world around us: intelligence, freedom and will. These three powers may or may not be oriented towards goodness. With intelligence, we can be able to discover and know the truth of things. With willpower, we can control our impulses and instincts and guide our actions towards what generates some kind of good for us. And with freedom, which must be instructed by intelligence, we can activate our will and decide for what most satisfies or suits us. But we could also not use our freedom the way intelligence dictates is good for us. Intelligence could tell us something and maybe we would not be able to properly use our freedom because we lack the necessary self-control. Our judgment could also be clouded, preventing us from making the right choices.

The interaction between the powers is an extensive field of study and its right exercise transformed into good operational habits is what Aristotle identified as the cardinal virtues: justice, fortitude, temperance and prudence.

People, in addition to being spirit, are matter. Far from being a duality in conflict, we are a unified whole. It is also important to highlight that we should acknowledge sexuality as an inseparable reality from our human condition. It is not an accessory, but rather a constitutive part of our being. It is something that we cannot rid ourselves from. Our sexuality permeates our humanity in a transversal way. In this sense, it is not merely biological data. Human sexuality is far from animal sexuality, which is instinctive and is determined by physical and sensitive aspects. In the development of our sexuality –human sexuality– the powers that I referred to in the previous paragraph can and should intervene: intelligence, freedom and will. In this sense, the place where we are born and where we display our talents can condition –but not determine– our development.

In previous paragraphs, I reviewed the foundations of the dignity of the person, their powers and their sexual nature. It is now convenient to focus on the cornerstone of this essay: women. Each sex has psychological, affective and cognitive traits that are its own and are complementary to each other. Women are usually more open to developing and expressing their affections. We are easily moved, touched. We are intuitive. In the words of Guerra:

It seems that women tend to have a particular ability for concrete intellect-sensitive understanding, that is, to take in, in a quasi-immediate way, the intelligible contents in concrete situations of daily life. This phenomenon is often called «intuition». By intuition, we do not want to point out a kind

of irrational dynamism that in a more or less arbitrary way points towards certain contents. What we want to express is that, in women, the intellectual activity is much more fused with sensitivity than in men. This allows an apprehension of what is real in a more holistic and immediate way<sup>3</sup>.

Considering this section, I think back to Professor Mushaben's dedication. The aforementioned anthropological keys nurture her experience (and mine). It certainly seems that "the same" and "equal" have different meanings. Perhaps, recognizing our particularities and opening ourselves to the complementarity between the feminine and the masculine can be a good starting point to correct injustices and alleviate inequalities that, even now, in the 21st century, can affect us.

### **Political vocation and service**

A few months ago I was invited to a political training course for women. I had never attended one. I have dedicated myself to the study of other subjects. I found space in my agenda and participated. I was struck by the fact that in the first session they invited me to reflect on "my vocation of power". I stopped to think of those two words: "vocation" and "power". In this section, I will share some considerations regarding this exercise.

I understand by vocation the call or the disposition to something. When a person identifies that they are called to any particular something and responds generously, they find human fulfillment and may even experience deep joy. Political vocation

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3 Rodrigo Guerra, "Identidad femenina y humanización del mundo. Aproximación de la determinación de la especificidad femenina como parámetro antropológico-normativo", *Revista Panamericana de Pedagogía* 7 (July 2005): 101-136, p. 113 <https://revistas.up.edu.mx/RPP/article/view/1840>.

is the dedication to the public and the search for justice. Now, this radical devotion requires effort and personal virtue. As Marco Tulio Cicero warned, it is a thorny path that can be full of temptations<sup>4</sup>. And to walk through it, without falling off the road, it is necessary to reflect on its reason for being. The question about my «vocation to power» led me to think about that: the ends. More specifically, I asked myself, what are the implications of associating my political vocation with power?

Power is a means, it is not an end. Tolkien gave this human reality a literary form in *The Lord of the Rings*. Let's remember how the ring had the ability to overcome the spirit of those who were not prepared to wear it. And the ability to have it did not lie in technique or accumulated material goods, but in the human quality of the wearer. That is to say, those who could wear it without consuming themselves inside were not the most enlightened or the richest. Those who could wear the ring without seriously injuring themselves were the simple and big-hearted people.

I have seen that associating a political vocation with a specific position imposes a very demanding personal itinerary because it places wielding actual power as an indicator of success. That is to say: the dedication and the sacrifices demanded by the vocation –which are not few– would only have ultimate meaning if they bear fruit in those terms. In a democracy, it would be to win an election to rule, and in a dictatorship, to gain space to dominate. It is a standpoint that I can understand, but I consider it risky

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4 Marco Tulio Cicerón explained how male and female politicians face three temptations in the path towards fulfilling our vocation: *libido pecunia*, *libido dominandi* and *libido venerea*. The first means administrative corruption; the second, the overwhelming desire for power; and the third, disorders of affections and feelings.



because it can take away our freedom. Without wanting to, we could become slaves of ambition. Let us consider for a moment that, despite our efforts and talents, we will never reach the desired position of power. Maybe the context is adverse, injustice prevails, or simply the will of the electorate does not accompany us. Then, we would not have reached the measure of success that we set for ourselves and we could think that our efforts have been in vain, fruitless.

I have devoted hours of reflection to this topic. Venezuela has suffered a serious erosion of democracy for more than twenty years, which has turned today into a dictatorship. The Chavista revolution came to power when I was 17 years old. I have dedicated my life to this fight. It is a personal –and a family– decision that involves risks. Certainly, I wish to contribute to democratic liberation and later reach a position that allows me to contribute to the transformation that Venezuela demands. I have strived and prepared for it. However, I don't know if that moment will come. This vital uncertainty is demanding. So, faced with this undesirable –but possible– scenario: What would happen to the meaning of my sacrifices? Would I have wasted my time? Would my efforts have been in vain? No. It would all have been worth it because the meaning of my vocation is not power, but service.

When the fruits of political vocation are associated with service, the indicators of success are the commitment and the good that we have offered to others with our generous dedication. In this sense, reaching a position of power is desirable, but irrelevant in terms of personal fulfillment. This does not mean that we abandon healthy ambition, which must be imbued with magnanimity. Quite the contrary, it is a question of their arrangement according to the true purposes of our donation. Reaching a position of power is desirable because a lot of good

could be done from there, but it is irrelevant because it does not determine –nor condition– the direction of my efforts. This matter is human and complex. The pressures and temptations of everyday life require constant rectification of intention. We must train our interior so that mere donation is enough and so we may close the doors to the disorderly search for power. Surely, during political life, «recalculating» the course should be necessary.

### **About the challenges**

In the last hundred years, Western civilization has made significant progress in terms of inclusion. In the second decade of the 21st century, it is common to see extraordinary women who participate in public affairs and contribute to decision-making processes. Still, there are pending tasks and challenges that we must reflect on and address. In this section, I will approach three: cultural, operational and existential.

By cultural challenges, I understand the structural configurations that can hinder the inclusion of women in public affairs. For example, the perception of politics as an eminently masculine sphere or the institutional structures that punish motherhood. There are two aspects that I consider fundamental for the analysis of these issues: first, to identify the uniqueness of each case, and second, to recognize the difficulties inherent to cultural changes.

First, the uniqueness of each case will be identified. Each society has its own characteristics. History, political culture, tradition, economic system and even geographical location can determine –and explain– ways of being<sup>5</sup>. In this sense, it is convenient to address the issue of the inclusion of women,

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5 In my opinion, one of the most outstanding contributions of German authors to Political Science is to highlight the importance of context in

matching global considerations with local realities. I have seen that sometimes ignoring the singular can lead to problems that can later hinder consensus. In addition to this, efforts to identify the particularities of each country must be accompanied by the application of scientific methodologies led by the intellectual rectitude of researchers. Only in this way can we avoid being instrumentalized or our just demands being exploited by ideological tendencies<sup>6</sup>.

Let us now look at the difficulties inherent in cultural changes. Culture configures the political DNA of the people. Changing it takes time and effort. For this reason, achieving stable transformations that overcome real injustices without creating new tensions is a great challenge that requires expertise,

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analysis. I recommend reviewing the contributions on social research methodology published by Dieter Nohlen and Wolfgang Merkel.

- 6 When reviewing the United Nations data on the inclusion of women in political spaces, I found that the countries that stand out in this indicator are undemocratic regimes (UN Women, 2019). Let's look at this reference. The countries with the highest female presence in Congresses are: Rwanda, Cuba and Bolivia. Rwanda registers 61.3% of women and, according to the democratic index of The Economist, it is an authoritarian regime and is located in 129th place. Cuba registers 53.2% of women. And according to the same index, it is an authoritarian regime and is ranked 143rd. Bolivia registers 53.1% of women. And according to The Economist, it is an authoritarian hybrid regime and is ranked 104th. By presenting this correlation –the presence of women in parliaments and the democratic index– I want to warn about a reality that I have suffered in my country: the political instrumentalization of women with purposes of autocratic domination. I will break this reality down in three concrete ideas. First, the data on women's participation must necessarily be accompanied by other indicators because, in itself and in isolation, it is not an indicator of democracy. Second, the issue of inclusion is complex and transcends pre-established slogans. Inclusion indicators should more accurately describe reality. And third, the political participation of women can benefit a system of justice and freedom if that person's normative preference is democratic.

intelligence and patience. As a Venezuelan, I am familiar with the effects of the imposition of radical projects that put aside real dialogue. In this sense, I believe that all social struggles –including ours– must be leveraged on human and almost artisanal political work that promotes the creation of consensus that benefits us all. In this way, I consider that the cultural challenges imposed by the struggle for the inclusion of women must be assumed with great realism and political maturity.

Operational challenges would be those aspects that limit the reconciliation of work and our family life. Women must juggle to tend to our responsibilities. Reconciling family, children, our intellectual concerns and our professional vocation is a daily challenge. For this conciliation to be a reality in our lives, there must be informal and formal solidarity structures that allow us to advance harmoniously in each of our areas. Informal or private solidarity structures are our families and friends: partners who accompany, children who understand, siblings who support, friends who encourage us to go far. They are the strongholds where we rest and recognize ourselves as loved for what we are and not for what we can give. In them and with them, we fully live gratuitousness. There is an important aspect about this area. Although it may be conditioned by chance, it demands effort. We must dedicate time to cultivating these shelters where we always win and become better.

Formal or public solidarity structures refer to those state initiatives that favor conciliation. The main obstacle to conciliation is poverty. A woman who must dedicate most of her efforts to survive<sup>7</sup> sees her ability to develop her talents severely limited.

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7 I recommend reviewing the analysis that CEPAZ offers. The organization indicates that “the effects of the emergency situation added to the pre-existing multidimensional crisis that exists in Venezuela are markedly

In this sense, it is essential to overcome material misery and have a responsible State that guarantees conditions for the common good. To achieve this end, we must necessarily include: fiscal aid for families, for single-parent homes, for “family-friendly” companies, quality public education, an efficient health system, maternity and lactation leave, nurseries, public spaces for entertainment, among others.

I will now turn to existential challenges. I understand existential challenges as those that Isabel Sánchez calls “suppressors of positive ambition”<sup>8</sup>. I am referring to the struggles we wage in our inner world that affect our performance in the public sphere. The author identifies the following: lack of self-esteem, exacerbated narcissism, and the need for continuous recognition or self-validation or validation from others. To overcome these and other difficulties of this nature, we must carefully take care of our affective and emotional stability. Self-knowledge helps a lot, as well as to establish self-assessment routines that allow us to rectify the course. Dedicating time to these tasks will make us better leaders because they will make us grow in self-knowledge and empathy.

### **About our integral development**

We have reflected on philosophical anthropology, the sense of the vocation of service, and the challenges we face in the exercise of politics. It is now convenient to ask ourselves about the mechanisms that we have at our disposal to advance towards the fullness of our vocation of public service. I want to share three

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different between women and men” <https://cepaz.org/articulos/mujeres-el-impacto-diferenciado-ante-la-crisis-de-la-pandemia/>

8 Isabel Sánchez, *Mujeres Brújula* (Madrid: ESPASA, 2020).

issues that I consider important for our integral development: training, empathy and generosity.

Let's start with training. To compete fairly and efficiently, we must –among other things– enhance our capabilities. The best way to achieve this is to grow politically and intellectually. Angela Merkel is perhaps the woman who has contributed the most to Western civilization so far in the 21st century. It is said that she has incredible mental agility. “While everyone is analyzing, she already has a solution”, say those who know her<sup>9</sup>. And that is not incidental. Besides being talented, she has a trained mind. She has a scientific structure. She has developed strengths such as order, effort and virtue. She cultivated her academic streak and then supplemented that dimension with political technique when reality required it. She knew how to humbly acknowledge her limitations at certain times. For example, when she came to Congress, she realized that she needed to improve her diction and did not hesitate to take public speaking classes to make herself understood better. She was aware of the importance of continuous training. Ms. Merkel –and her peers– teach us that the best way to be competitive is by preparing ourselves to serve more and better in public.

Dedication comes next. We live in accelerated times and many times we think that meteoric ascents are the best. Venezuelan culture is especially poor in that sense: we overestimate initial impulses because we have a hard time being consistent. It is what Rafael Tomás Caldera calls: “Pessimism and presumption”<sup>10</sup>. It is a vicious circle: the presumption of those who believe

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9 Joyce Mushaben, *Becoming Madam Chancellor: Angela Merkel and the Berlin Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

10 Rafael Tomás Caldera. *Ensayos sobre nuestra situación cultural* (Caracas: Fundación para la Cultura Urbana, 2007): 63.

in entrepreneurship and the pessimism that comes from not reaching our goals. The itinerary and leadership of Merkel, Christine Lagarde, Ursula Von der Leyen, Madeleine Albright, Hillary Clinton, Condoleezza Rice, among others, shows us the importance of sustained commitment over time. It is important to bet firmly on dedicated and patient effort; on bold and institutional delivery; to work with detachment and without complexes; to refine our gaze in order to notice difficulties and to find ways to overcome them with integrity and discover the good in each circumstance. As time passes, I understand the importance of overcoming wounds and creating paths of empathy that allow us to move forward.

Finally, generosity. Between 2001 and 2005 –as “Angie” rose through the CDU– journalists in Germany began to talk about the “Merkel Factor”. She earned the respect of the press. The journalists highlighted: “her lack of vanity, her ability to work behind the scenes, her patience to watch events that occurred inadvertently and her ability to outperform her rivals”<sup>11</sup>. This description amazes me. It shows boldness and intelligence. It is evidence of a self-confident person who does politics and opens up to the world without complexes. She is a State woman.

That spirit was translated into solidarity once she came to power. Ursula Von der Leyen –current president of the European Commission– says that in 2005 Merkel called her to be part of her cabinet. Von der Leyen<sup>12</sup> hesitated when accepting the invitation. She feared that her family responsibilities would make the

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11 Joyce Mushaben, *Becoming Madam Chancellor: Angela Merkel and the Berlin Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017): 22.

12 I recommend listening to the podcast: *Fighting biases and empowering women: A conversation on female leadership and gender equality*. In: [https://www.ecb.europa.eu/press/tvservices/podcast/html/ecb.pod210308\\_episode15.en.html](https://www.ecb.europa.eu/press/tvservices/podcast/html/ecb.pod210308_episode15.en.html)

desired conciliation impossible. When she expressed her doubts, the chancellor told her: “You must accept because you are ready and you will be an example for everyone”. And so, Von der Leyen joined the government, and Germany had a Family Minister who was the mother of seven youngsters.

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With these lines I'll conclude this essay in which I wanted to organize and present ideas that seek to contribute to the reflection on issues that I consider to be fundamental for the development of our political vocation. I admire and am moved by the strength and tenderness displayed by so many women who seek to build a better world for their families and their communities. In moments of necessary demands, I see it necessary to return to the anthropological perspective and rediscover the benefits that our feminine condition offers us. The horizon is open and we are called to travel through it with joy, pride and optimism. Being a woman is wonderful.



# The power of violence against women: fictitious inclusion, actual exclusion

Luz Mely Reyes

## Numbers, stories and inequality

On April 18, 2010, one of the most shocking femicides in Venezuela was perpetrated. Boxer Edwin “Inca” Valero killed his wife, Jennifer Carolina Viera Finol<sup>1</sup>. Later in his detention cell, the famous athlete committed suicide. Eleven years later, on April 19, 2021, a loud wave of voices emerged among Venezuelan social networks. With the hashtag #Yosítecreo<sup>2</sup>, Venezuelan women from different parts of the world began to denounce the harassment, sexual abuse and violent situations that they had suffered at the hands of men in the public arena. One of the accused, the Caracas writer Willy McKey, died when he leaped from the 9th floor of a building in Buenos Aires. A cycle was thus repeated: the victims and the debate fell into the background when the aggressor took his own life.

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1 <https://www.europapress.es/internacional/noticia-examen-psiquiatrico-revela-boxeador-inca-tenia-personalidad-inestable-impulsiva-20100422081046.html>

2 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/es/post-opinion/2021/05/12/venezuela-yo-te-creo-violencia-genero-feminismo-me-too/>

This article starts off with extreme expressions of violence against women to lead the way into politics. We understand that all types of violence directed against women are themselves a form of exercising power and are always a form of belittlement of women with the purpose of disciplining them; they also seek to subdue men who resist normative masculinity. Therefore, it is not surprising that political violence appears as a determining obstacle for women. María Rojas Valverde (2012) suggests that this violence is as dissimilar as it is perverse in its daily expressions, which range from harassment to femicide (Flores, 2020).

### **Has Venezuelan society moved forward since 2010 to 2021?**

The first two, drastic examples –each, by the way, linked in one way or another to the country's political poles– are relevant because violence against women –which contemplates femicide as one of its most extreme expressions– must be understood from a comprehensive perspective. The bottom line is that they share a starting point: power and the way it is conceived.

Pre-existing disparities furthermore grew during the COVID-19 pandemic, according to the **2020 Global Gender Gap Report**<sup>3</sup>. The index analyzes indicators in areas such as economic participation and opportunities, political participation, education and health, and survival. In the edition published in March 2021, preliminary data suggest that the health emergency and

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3 The *World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report* was first presented in 2006 to measure the magnitude of the gap between women and men in terms of health, education, economy and political indicators, considering the following areas: (1) Economic participation and opportunity: salaries, participation and highly skilled employment, (2) Education: access to basic and higher levels of education, (3) Political participation: representation in decision-making structures, and (4) Health and survival: life expectancy and male-female ratio ([http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_GGGR\\_2021.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2021.pdf)).

the corresponding economic recession have affected women more than men, partially reopening gaps that had already been closed. The findings indicate that the worldwide average distance completed towards reaching parity stands at 68%, which represents a decline compared to the previous report (-0.6 percentage points). These figures are mainly driven by a decrease in the results of large countries. If it continues its current trajectory, it would take 135.6 years to close the gender gap across the entire world. Also, the report found that the gender gap in terms of political empowerment remains the largest of the four gaps analyzed, reaching a scarce 22% of fulfillment to date, having increased from the previous report by 2.4 percentage points.

With an index of 0.699 (the closer to 0, the larger the gap), Venezuela is located in position 91 out of a total of 156 countries analyzed, scoring lower than 21 countries in the region including Nicaragua, Bolivia, Peru, Colombia, far behind African nations such as Namibia, and below Zimbabwe and Mozambique. Iceland, Finland and Norway occupy the top three positions and yet none of these nations have achieved a score of 1.

A gender gap is the distance between men and women in terms of access to political participation, resources, education and other factors that guarantee the full enjoyment of their rights.

In the case of Venezuela, a score of 0.69 means that women have approximately 29% fewer opportunities than men.

Disaggregated by area, the gender gap identified in political empowerment in Venezuela is almost 80%, reaching a score of 0.199. Its best performance was found in the health sector with 0.980, which places it among the first in the group of countries analyzed.

“Pre-existing gender gaps have amplified the crisis asymmetrically between men and women, even when women have been at the frontlines of managing the crisis as essential workers. The hardest hit sectors by lockdowns and rapid digitalization are those where women are more frequently employed. Combined with the additional pressures of providing care in the home, the crisis has halted progress toward gender parity in several economies and industries”, states WEF’s report.

This scenario is conducive to generating situations of violence and micro-violence, especially when there is such a notable exclusion in the political arena.

“Violence against women is the expression of a patriarchal system of power. That is why it occurs not only in the sphere of the family but also in politics, in companies: because they are the spaces for decision-making. If they are understood as zero-sum spaces, then it results in violence, which can range from harassment to micro-sexism –such as being laughed at, being the subject of memes, not being heard, getting interrupted...” sums up Susana Reina<sup>4</sup>.

#Yosítecreo has generated public conversations filled with reactions, resistance and especially the re-victimization of the complainants, as well as the political use of the questions raised. This leads us to think that there has been no progress in terms of gender stereotypes or prejudices in society. This calls for a public discussion, with the support of organizations that have experience working on these issues.

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4 I consulted Susana Reina on this matter. She helped me build definitions based on Gender Theory. Reina is the founder of Feminismo Inc. (<https://feminismoinc.org>).

The public debate on this matter has seemed to lag behind in our country, I presume, due to the fact that social leaders and advocates have focused on other problems, that their voices and warnings are not heard en masse, and because one of the traps of polarization is to misrepresent fundamental issues that aim towards defending human rights, and then favor these according to political tendencies,—e.g. equal marriage, abortion, among others.

A basic expression of these manipulations occurs with the inclusive language accepted by the Real Academia Española de la Lengua. Once used by Chavismo actors, it creates apprehensions in other sectors. While the rest of Latin America debates the uses of *todes*<sup>5</sup>, and the conversation extends to how to refer to non-binary definitions, Venezuela is still immersed in a Byzantine debate about using both feminine and masculine articles and grammatical endings associated with the visibility of binary opposites.

This power and its exercise does not have an ideological —left or right— dimension. If organizations of different tendencies can agree on something, it is on the fact that the treatment of women is influenced by a lack of equity. While some cases border on a pseudo-compassionate paternalism, others express plain denialism.

Disqualifying a priori a conception of power that values a woman's life in a different way, or ignoring that this logic affects the exercise of rights, even if there is a favorable legislative framework, delays a discussion that is necessary in Venezuela.

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5 A gender neutral alternative to the Spanish word for “all”, “todos” (masc) or “todas” (fem).

## Fictitious inclusion

One aspect of the exercise of violence against women is the instrumentalization of females to make people believe that there is a process of inclusion, such as assigning a certain number of them to decision-making positions. Evangelina García Prince refers to this as subordinate inclusion<sup>6</sup>, which in practice is a real form of exclusion:

The exclusion suffered by Venezuelan women in the public space becomes, mimetically, a **subordinate inclusion**, which in practice is a *fictitious inclusion*, equivalent to **actual exclusion**, not from the system itself, because it is within the political system, but of the decisive positions and processes that define democratic public and political life.

The strategies that the structures of the public and political world use to give the subordinate inclusion of women the appearance of true inclusion are varied; strategies that have an eminently symbolic nature, aimed at creating inclusion solutions for women that appear politically correct and that preserve the supremacy, values, criteria and practices of the dominant androcentric gender order. They are inclusion practices that could be classified as postmodern inspiration due to their apparent nature and the emphasis placed on political correctness: changes in language that become fairly gender inclusive, such as that used in the Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, the creation of spaces for women yet with no capacity to influence political decisions, tokenism to lead to believe that they are included,

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6 La participación política de las mujeres en Venezuela: Situación actual y estrategias para su ampliación (<https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/caracas/09154.pdf>).

the increase in the female presence in insignificant or expendable positions and spaces in a time of crisis or whose disappearance does not affect the real stability of the organizations” (own translation).

The inequality in the political participation of Venezuelan women means that, by January 2021, our country occupies the 90th place in the world ranking of political participation of women in parliaments, with 22% of women in the National Assembly.

Mitzy Flores<sup>7</sup>, researcher, observes the patriarchal imaginaries still remnant in political parties, as well as in society’s beliefs, that hinder the visibility and effective participation of women in all spaces. Together with women’s diminished economic capacity to finance their own candidacies, this favors the emergence of men for candidacies, further excluding women.

Low representation in the spheres of political organizations also takes place in a country that measures women who exercise a public function not by their performance, but by their gender. We have seen a pattern of defamation and verbal abuse and assaults on women of different tendencies that refer to their physical characteristics.

At different levels of violence, there have been arbitrary arrests and human rights violations of female political prisoners. Foro Penal’s lawyer, Gonzalo Himiob, in an April 2021 report, noted that despite the fact that female political prisoners are still much less in number than their male counterparts, repression

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7 La violencia política contra las mujeres en Venezuela. Un fenómeno creciente (<https://www.otrasvoceseneducacion.org/archivos/335474>).

has doubled. He observed there are now twice as many women imprisoned for political reasons than at the beginning of 2020<sup>8</sup>.

Of 19 political prisoners, 84% have been tortured and ill-treated. 17 of them are accused of treason to the homeland. One of them, Emirlendris Carolina Benítez, was pregnant at the time of her arrest. She suffered a miscarriage. She was detained after she was linked, via her husband, to the alleged drone attack on Nicolás Maduro in August 2018.

The Organic Law<sup>9</sup> on the right of women to a life free of violence contemplates 21 types of violence, but none refers to political violence. In contrast, Bolivia's Law 243<sup>10</sup>, enacted in 2012, defines harassment and political violence.

- **Political harassment:** the act or set of acts of pressure, persecution, harassment or threats, committed by a person or group of persons, directly or through third parties, against women candidates, elected, appointed or exercising a political-public function, or against their families, with the purpose of shortening, suspending, preventing or restricting them from fulfilling the functions inherent to their position, or of inducing or forcing them to carry out, against their will, an action or to incur in an omission in

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8 Mujeres presas políticas en Venezuela (<https://www.observatorio-nacionalddhh.com/2021/04/informe-de-mujeres-presas-politicas-en-venezuela/>).

9 Ley orgánica sobre el derecho de las mujeres a una vida libre de violencia ([https://oig.cepal.org/sites/default/files/2014\\_ven\\_feminicidio\\_ley\\_organica\\_sobre\\_derecho\\_de\\_mujeres\\_a\\_una\\_vida\\_libre\\_de\\_violencia\\_25\\_11\\_14-1.pdf](https://oig.cepal.org/sites/default/files/2014_ven_feminicidio_ley_organica_sobre_derecho_de_mujeres_a_una_vida_libre_de_violencia_25_11_14-1.pdf)).

10 Ley contra el acoso y violencia política hacia las mujeres ([http://www.coordinadoradelamujer.org.bo/observatorio/archivos/marco/2012\\_BOL\\_Ley243\\_346.pdf](http://www.coordinadoradelamujer.org.bo/observatorio/archivos/marco/2012_BOL_Ley243_346.pdf)).



the fulfillment of their functions or in the exercise of their rights.

- **Political violence:** the actions, behaviors and/or physical, psychological and sexual forms of aggression, committed by a person or a group of persons, directly or through third parties, against women candidates, elected, appointed or exercising a political-public function, or against their families, with the purpose of shortening, suspending, preventing or restricting them from fulfilling the functions inherent to their positions, or of inducing or forcing them to carry out, against their will, an action or to incur in an omission in the fulfillment of their functions or in the exercise of their rights.

I am sure that, to anyone aware of the contemporary political scene in Venezuela reading these definitions, some emblematic cases come to mind. For instance, Judge Afiuni and leader María Corina Machado have both been violated in their exercise of political-public functions.

Defining these concepts is not easy. There are still international debates which seek to review them. According to more general parameters, political violence can constitute a violation of human rights.

There are two definitions that I think can contribute to the discussion:

Krook<sup>11</sup> argues that any act of violence against a female politician is an act of political violence based on gender. According

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11 Género y violencia política en América latina. Conceptos, debates y soluciones ([http://www.scielo.org.mx/scielo.php?script=sci\\_arttext&pid=S1665-20372016000100127](http://www.scielo.org.mx/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S1665-20372016000100127)).

o the author, it includes any “physical and/or psychological aggression exerted by partisan leaders and other political actors, to resist the presence of women in public life”. And even though each act is directed to a specific woman, “these actions are directed against all women, in an attempt to preserve politics under male dominance”.

### **What can be done?**

The definitions here mentioned have been contested. However, these disagreements are usually outlined to avoid the substantive debate that allows us to move forward and seek strategies and promote public policies that guarantee the real protection of women's rights. It creates an obstacle in understanding that this issue is a matter of human rights, that we live in a sexist, patriarchal society, and that the presence of women does not guarantee an integral approach which focuses on inequalities, asymmetries and intersectionalities of a matter of impact not only in Venezuela but across borders.

Progress has been made in the region, but has not yet reached our country. Bolivian Law 243 is considered a fundamental precedent; Argentina recently approved a law legalizing the right of women to terminate their pregnancies; in Mexico, violence against women is widely discussed and researched. Venezuela has had a feminist movement, which in the 1980s achieved victories for the non-partisan approach to these issues. Venezuelan feminist voices nowadays seem to be less heard, not because they are lacking, but instead because Venezuelan society is not really paying the attention this topic deserves.

One of the necessary steps is to broaden the argued debate on what the current situation is, check how our biases affect the way we perceive violence against women, verify if legal instruments

have really met their objectives or what the status on the provisions that contemplate such norms is.

It is also important to encourage the participation of women in popularly elected positions at electoral time. This is due to the historical debt that there is with equity and the alternation that implies 50% of female candidacies, a proposal that was excluded from the constitutional amendment. Another factor I consider to be vital is the training of journalists in the emerging digital and other traditional media so as not only to raise awareness about violence against women, but also that the organizations that work in this field can have spaces to amplify their messages and actions in the media.

If the life of Jennifer, as well as those of the 256<sup>12</sup> women murdered in 2020, are worthless, then so are the many others in different conditions, no matter how much we want to believe that we are protected by some rights or by our particular living situation, or how we've normalized the micro-violences we all live under believing them to not be as important or widespread as they really are.

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12 Monitoreos de femicidios ([https://cepaz.org/documentos\\_informes/monitoreo-de-femicidios-mayo-2021/](https://cepaz.org/documentos_informes/monitoreo-de-femicidios-mayo-2021/)).

# Challenges of political participation: my experience

Liz Carolina Jaramillo

The political participation of women is increasingly necessary, considering the ongoing cultural and political evolution. If we want to achieve more just, peaceful and egalitarian societies, then there must be representation of over 50% of the world's population in each area of impact. Women's perspective should be included in interventions and decision-making processes.

Parliaments are a representation of our democracy. Our parliament mirrors the state of our democracy.

When women decide to participate in politics, we must face many obstacles, yet we must be familiarized with notions of equality and aspire to inclusion in order to notice them. Many times, we ourselves are the victims of unfairness and, as such, it is hard for us to recognize what happens, so instead of condemning injustice, we normalize and fail to reject it.

## **How did I become a parliamentary member?**

My experience on the National Parliamentary stage was very productive. I feel that I grew considerably as a politician working as a public servant, and I understood the role that both men and women should definitely occupy in public spaces: encouraging

balance in each scenario, being the voice and representation of those who trust in our leadership, in our actions.

I have been politically active since my time as a student leader, when I sought solutions to make the life of “*Sansebastianeros*” students happier, less hard, through transportation routes, and social benefits for students. Later on, I worked alongside the Governor of the State of Guárico, Venezuela, in his office. From ages 19 to 23 I worked as his assistant, managing his schedule and coordinating alongside a great team tours around the state.

At the same time, I was working hand-in-hand with my husband, who aspired to become the mayor of the San Sebastián Municipality, in the south of state of Aragua, which he fortunately won. I dedicated myself to accompanying him throughout his days in office, managing the social branch, and taking on the first ever role of a young female municipal leader.

After two periods fulfilling this responsibility, I was sought out by my (current) political organization, *Primero Justicia*, in order to form the electoral model for the National Assembly for Circuit 4 of the Aragua State, a circuit that for 19 years had been represented by a man from the official government party. Now, it was to be a multi-member circuit, which would yield two main seats and two alternates to the National Assembly.

I was facing a dilemma. Initially I resisted the idea of taking on this offer, for it seemed really challenging and scary. But I ended up accepting. My campaign manager at the time said something to me that is still engraved in my memory: “Asking for water is not the same as giving it away”.

I had always been in political action, service, articulation, organization teams, but I had never been the leading figure. Now,

I was supposed to address crowds, do speeches, concentrate the emotions of the people, merge their feelings with mine. Despite being part of a campaign for national unity, very well designed and articulated, I was facing a new scenario.

Arriving at the National Assembly was surprising for me. I underestimated our triumph. We have always known that the electoral contest against the regime is always contaminated, loaded with tricks, so we feared that a victory, even a perfectly fair one, would not be acknowledged. However, our triumph was recognized and so began the meetings and the organization of work teams for performing our parliamentary responsibility.

My organization, Primero Justicia, had a very important role. I am still very grateful for being part of a team that considered, trained and accompanied me, to have been guided with humility and detachment by people with experience in the legislative role.

Even though people around me trusted me, my capabilities and my experience, I still felt like I was navigating through new, unknown waters. And I definitely was, yet I knew I had to live up to my commitment. I won't deny some difficulties I faced. Journalists, parliamentary assistants, legislative teams were sometimes very kind and collaborative, but on other occasions I met people who underestimated my abilities, noticed my inexperience, and mockingly underestimated my need to know and to learn. I understood that I should take advantage of the space I occupied in order to serve.

### **My commitment to equal opportunities**

The relationships built within the National Assembly and my political party offered me invitations to train in feminism, equality and the participation of women in politics.

Elaisa Ferris, Family Secretary of Primero Justicia, always invited and accompanied me. Since then, I have been able to get close to figures and women in politics who are very admired and important to me, such as Evangelina Garcia Prince, former senator, sociologist, anthropologist and feminist activist; Natalia Brandler, President of the Cauce Association dedicated to the training of women in politics, and Susana Reina, of Feminismo Inc, psychologist, coach and whom I later chose as my mentor. This was a great learning experience, understanding the importance of mentoring as a transforming tool for professional development, especially in the area of politics.

Being in the midst of this team and in permanent training on the importance of gender equality to advance in women's issues, I understood that I had been offered great opportunities in my life, that my own behavior and professional development had earned me others, but that not many of my female peers in Venezuela had the same chances. I began to understand the need to develop proposals to support the political participation of women in different spaces of the national arena, but especially within my political organization.

It is to my understanding that proposals to take over powerful positions and offer services that answer the population's needs are structured within the spaces of political organizations.

In addition to promoting and developing the issue of women's political participation, we must maintain our presence in other areas such as science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and generally in academia. We must place our attention on women who are not only leaders in the so-called soft sciences, but also in hard sciences (i.e., the aforementioned areas).

## **The glass ceiling in politics**

All this experience made me understand that, when women decide to participate in politics, we face great obstacles. I would like to discuss three of them: The first one is there from the get-go and has to do with daring to make the decision to delve into politics. We may be academically prepared, but the field is unknown, so we must develop skills to work in public issues.

The second obstacle is of a cultural nature: stereotypical questions such as «Whom will she leave the children with?» or “She’s gotten this far because she is the wife of...”, the distrust of families on the prestige of being a woman in politics.

The third obstacle has to do with the issue of permanence. We find ourselves faced with actions that we don’t identify with and that displace us from the public, forcing us to return to the private scene. This is political violence. When a woman makes a bad decision, she is much more condemned, more looked down on than a man would be. The personal cost is ending up divorced or with broken families.

We belong to patriarchal societies with very marked roles of what men and women should do. As women, we have advanced rapidly to position ourselves in the workplace, but mostly by taking on too many roles: work, but also traditional and even sexist roles assigned to women such as caring for children, parents, preparing meals, cleaning, among others).

My experience has not been different. Being in such a demanding work and political scene always led me to build an important support team, which would allow me to tend to my



role as a mother remotely, helping with my children's homework, and also providing permanent care to my parents.

### **Building an egalitarian democracy is my commitment**

A society that prides itself on being democratic should do everything possible and necessary so women do not feel discriminated for being in public spaces and so men also feel comfortable in the private space of the home and caring for children.

Women are not a social representation. We are not a minority: we are more than 50% of the world's population. Therefore, the intervention of the State –understood as the set of institutions that aim at the development of society– through affirmative actions is necessary. The State thus recognizes that there have been historical discriminations and shows the political will to rectify them. These most common affirmative actions are quota laws that seek to move toward absolute parity.

Quotas or parity have generated changes in countries that have established them. In Mexico and Spain, for example, there was medium representation, and affirmative actions have been achieved with a floor of 30% that have been misconstrued as a ceiling and not as a quota minimal.

### **The leading role of political parties**

This experience of parliamentary political participation also allows me to understand that it is through political parties that we can generate social change. Political parties are going through credibility crises and applying inclusive strategies for women in leading and decision-making positions is a smart strategy to overcome this.

Political parties are organizations that aim to wield power, and that can mitigate discrimination against women in their operating structures.

Political parties must not only incorporate women into their administrative and decision-making structures; they must generate proposals and specific programs that consider the needs, expectations and interests of women in order to be truly inclusive organizations.

Political parties are the social expression of people's wills, with whom they have things in common, with which they imagine a model of society. If this model does not include the expectations, needs or interests of women, it would be an exclusionary program.

Political parties as opinion generators must put women's issues on the public agenda:

1. Include the issue in the general proposal of the party.
2. Make the candidates refer to the topic.
3. Manifesto in the statutes of political parties.
4. When elections are won, those elected must make the commitment of creating spaces for the participation and inclusion of women.

It is vital to guarantee that political parties are sisterhood spaces, so that women remain active within it during electoral times or not.

### **Men and women for a common agenda**

Women must develop a common agenda through activist organizations, aimed at raising awareness of the need to build more decision-making spaces together.

Women will begin to break down barriers or overcome obstacles as we become more educated. When one of us is educated and sensitized, she educates and sensitizes a brother, a son, another man. Inequalities do not overcome themselves, policies must be generated to move forward.

The notion of leadership has evolved, from the managerial hierarchical model to the conscious model of servant leadership, and there, men and women have much to contribute if we work together for a common purpose. This is my life mission and that is why I will continue working.

# Venezolanas Investigan: Why was it created and who is part of it?

Adriana Boersner Herrera

Women represent 50% of the population, a trend that seems to be on-going not only in general around the world but also particularly at the regional level. Today, however, this 50% is not equitably represented in government headquarters, congresses, parliaments or national assemblies, activism in political parties, academia, high and middle ranks of private companies, among other areas.

There has undoubtedly been some progress, but it has been slow and, in some areas and disciplines, it is still illusory. Although talk about the discriminatory culture towards women and the struggle for women's civil and political rights is more open today, this issue had already been addressed in the 20th century at various levels, whether international, regional or local<sup>1</sup>: for example, through the Inter-American Convention on the Granting of Civil Rights to Women<sup>2</sup> adopted by the Organization

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1 See Secretary of the Interior. "Compilación de tratados internacionales Mujeres". <http://codhet.org.mx/WP/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/MUJERES.pdf>; UNESCO. "Conventions and Declarations." <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/unesco/themes/gender-equality/resources/conventions-and-declarations/>

2 Inter-American Convention on the Granting of Civil Rights to Women (1948) [https://www.oas.org/dil/esp/Convencion\\_Interamericana\\_sobre](https://www.oas.org/dil/esp/Convencion_Interamericana_sobre)

of American States (1948); the convention on the political rights of women<sup>3</sup> approved in 1952; the convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women<sup>4</sup> (1979); the declaration on the elimination of violence against women<sup>5</sup> (1993); and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action<sup>6</sup> (1995).

This article focuses on exposing the disparity between men and women in areas such as politics and academia. This will serve as a background to present a recently created network of female Venezuelan experts called *Venezolanas Investigan*. This network, along with others that have been built both in Venezuela and abroad, responds to the need to highlight the work of women in different areas and to create more tools to ensure that the presence and perspective of women is considered and valued in different forums and meetings.

## Women in politics

The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the United Nations Organization of Women (UN Women) are two international references that regularly present world rankings on the representation of women in politics. According to data from

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\_Concesion\_Derechos\_Civiles\_a\_la\_Mujer.pdf

- 3 Convention on the political rights of women (1952) <https://www.acnur.org/fileadmin/Documentos/BDL/2001/0019.pdf?file=fileadmin/Doc>
- 4 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979) <https://www.ohchr.org/sp/professionalinterest/pages/cedaw.aspx>
- 5 Declaration on the elimination of violence against women (1993) <https://www.ohchr.org/sp/professionalinterest/pages/violenceagainstwomen.aspx>
- 6 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) [https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/csw/bpa\\_s\\_final\\_web.pdf?la=es&vs=755](https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/csw/bpa_s_final_web.pdf?la=es&vs=755)

the IPU and UN Women<sup>7</sup>, as of January 2020, the majority of women in 190 countries held ministerial positions in the area of social affairs, family, environment, employment/labor, women's affairs, trade/industry and culture. There are no female ministers in foreign policy on the list. To a lesser extent, women have reached ministerial positions in areas such as finance/budgeting, economics/development and defense. This reality is replicated even in countries considered to be "developed", such as the United States<sup>8</sup> or various European countries.

From the historical point of view, Venezuelan women have been active in politics, although their role has not been particularly exalted in analyses or in various areas, not even in basic education books. Thanks to the legacy of many women who defended women's rights, the 20th century was important in terms of demanding those rights internationally, regionally and locally. In Latin America, from the early 20th century to the mid-60s, women fought and won the right to vote in several countries<sup>9</sup>. In Venezuela, some women joined clandestine groups during Juan Vicente Gómez's dictatorship and fought later against Marcos Pérez Jiménez's<sup>10</sup>. Some even achieved the position of deputies during what is known as the Venezuelan democratic triennium

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7 UN Women. Women in Politics: 2020 (January 2020) <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2020/women-in-politics-map-2020-es.pdf?la=en&vs=828>

8 Center for American Women and Politics. Women appointed to presidential cabinets (April 2021) <https://cawp.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/resources/womenapptdtoprescabinets.pdf>

9 Magally Huggins Castañeda, "Re-escribiendo la historia: Las Venezolanas y sus luchas por los derechos políticos", *Revista Venezolana de Estudios de la Mujer* 15, no 34 (2010): 163-190.

10 C A Rakowski, "Unity in diversity and adversity: Venezuelan women's struggle for human rights", *INSTRAW NEWS* 28 (1998): 26-33. Fania Petzoldt y Jacinta Bevilacqua, *Nosotras también nos jugamos la vida* (Caracas: Editorial Ateneo, 1979).

(1945-1948). And some women fought for political rights, starting with suffrage in Venezuela<sup>11</sup>.

Despite some progress, gender inequality continues to be evident on several fronts of the Venezuelan political sphere today, such as in the representation of women within political parties. Betilde Muñoz-Pogossian points out that in 2020 only 2 women were presidents of political parties, while the reforms to increase the quota of women within parties have been purely numerical<sup>12</sup>. In 1997, the Organic Law of Suffrage and Political Participation was created and approved, which required that at least 30% of the candidates at the legislative, state, municipal and parish levels be women. Then, in 2005, the National Electoral Council forced political parties to include greater representation of women in their organizations. What simply happened was that women were listed in non-relevant districts, while “70% of titular members were men and 70% of alternates were women”<sup>13</sup>.

Evangelina García Prince<sup>14</sup> –expert on the issue of women in Venezuelan politics who taught in several universities in Venezuela– addresses the clear segregation between men and women within Venezuelan political parties:

There are parties where no type of internal organization of women is contemplated; others do have it, but not as a part of the decision-making structure. There are, however, three parties where there is an internal organization of women:

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11 Magally Huggins Castañeda, “Re-escribiendo...”

12 Betilde Muñoz-Pogossian. Por más mujeres en la política venezolana. *El Nacional* (May 2020) <https://www.elnacional.com/opinion/por-mas-mujeres-en-la-politica-venezolana/>

13 Betilde Muñoz-Pogossian, “Por más...”

14 Desireé Lozano. (2014) La mujer venezolana en la política: una lucha de 100 años. *Voces Visibles* <https://www.vocesvisibles.com/la-mujer-venezolana-en-la-politica-una-lucha-de-100-anos/>

*Women's Action Secretariat of Democratic Action (Secretaría de Acción Femenina de Acción Democrática), Women's Front of the Movement towards Socialism (Frente de Mujeres del Movimiento al Socialismo) and Women's Secretariat of the Social Christian Party COPEI (Secretaría Femenina del Partido Social Cristiano COPEI).* This type of organization exists, but without clear and manifest influence on the decisions that directly impact the political direction of the organization.

For their part, the governing party United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV), as well as the Primero Justicia, Proyecto Venezuela and La Causa R parties, lacks such sections or internal grouping units of women's movements.

This segregation means that problems that affect women such as femicide, economic vulnerability, among others, are not addressed in the plans of these political parties, while there is still indifference towards these problems on the part of the parties<sup>15</sup>.

In the local Venezuelan sphere, barely 18.2% of councilors were women by 2006<sup>16</sup>. Greater local participation can be achieved, as is the case of Belize and Bolivia, countries that by the year 2018 had a number of female councilors of 67.2%, followed by Bolivia with 51.1%. The number of female mayors in Venezuela by the

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15 Xili Duran. (2020). Movimientos feministas en Venezuela trascienden la polarización política. *Global Voices* <https://es.globalvoices.org/2020/03/29/movimientos-feministas-de-venezuela-trascienden-la-polarizacion-politica/>

16 Observatorio de Igualdad de Género de América Latina y el Caribe. Mujeres Concejales Electas <https://oig.cepal.org/es/indicadores/mujeres-concejales-electas>



year 2018 was 22.7%<sup>17</sup>, while there were 5 female governors out of 23 governorates by 2017, that is, 21.7%.

Another front in the political sphere in which the inequality between genders can be seen is the representation of women in the national legislative power. Globally, only 20.5% of women are presidents of parliament or congresses. After the parliamentary elections of December 2015 in Venezuela, the representation of women in the National Assembly stood at 22.2%, thus occupying position 97 out of 192<sup>18</sup>. This number doubled in 21 years, after having a female representation of 11,5% in the Constituent Assembly of 1999.

Finally, in the case of the executive branch, the number of heads of state (female presidents) globally, in January 2020, was 6.6%, while the number of female heads of government (prime minister/chancellor) was 6.2%. This low percentage of women as heads of state or government is also a model of what happens in the diplomatic sphere. For example, in the most recent meeting of the Group of Seven<sup>19</sup> –better known as the G-7– only two women, the German Chancellor Angela Merkel and the president of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen were present in the official photo.

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17 Observatorio de Igualdad de Género de América Latina y el Caribe. Mujeres Alcaldesas Electas <https://oig.cepal.org/es/indicadores/mujeres-alcaldesas-electas>

18 IPU Parline, Global data on national parliaments, Monthly ranking of women in national parliaments. (October 2020) <https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking?month=10&year=2020>

19 The G-7 is an intergovernmental group or forum that brings together the strongest economies within the framework of the International Monetary Fund, also considered the richest liberal democracies in the world.

Venezuela has never had a woman as head of state<sup>20</sup>. Despite this, women have been appointed to ministerial cabinets. In one of the most recent, the executive cabinet that began in 2007, women represented 18.5% of the executive cabinet. By January 2020, 23.5% of the ministerial positions appointed by Nicolás Maduro were held by women, with Venezuela occupying position number 73 out of 190 in the ranking established by UN Women<sup>21</sup>.

In the case of the so-called interim government or legitimate government chaired by Juan Guaidó since 2019, the presidential commissioners who were to promote the interim government plan both nationally and internationally were entirely men, including Leopoldo López, Julio Borges, Humberto Prado, Javier Troconis, Alejandro Plaz, Miguel Pizarro and Leopoldo Castillo<sup>22</sup>. In addition, more men were appointed in other areas such as special prosecutors, fight against corruption, citizen service, and security and intelligence. From the beginning, in the international arena, women were appointed as diplomatic representatives of this government. However, those appointments were not representative compared to the percentage of men. For example, only considering the Americas, only 5 out of 18 appointments as diplomatic representatives were women<sup>23</sup>.

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20 UN Women.

21 UN Women.

22 Maru Morales. Guaidó comenzó a formar gabinete y nombró a Leopoldo López como su coordinador. *Crónica Uno* (August 2019) <https://cronica.uno/guaido-comenzo-a-formar-gabinete-y-nombro-a-leopoldo-lopez-como-su-coordinador/>

23 Maru Morales. Conozca a los representantes diplomáticos de Venezuela nombrados por Guaidó y la AN. *Crónica Uno* (March 2019) <https://cronica.uno/conozca-a-los-representantes-diplomaticos-de-venezuela-nombrados-por-guaido-y-la-an/>

## Women in academy

Just like in politics, imbalances and discrimination are also evident in the academic field. For this reason, the increase in research on gender discrimination and equal opportunities in academia has been remarkable in recent years. Between 2016 and 2017, more than half of the people who graduated with a doctorate degree in the United States were women. However, despite this achievement, comparatively, women continue to earn lower salaries than men<sup>24</sup>.

There are other prejudices –which are not all mentioned here– that also affect women within the academy. For example, women are cited less than men, while women are more likely than men –at least in areas such as in political and social sciences in the United States– to cite their female colleagues<sup>25</sup>. The percentage of female professors with doctoral degrees who achieve high ranks within the academy varies depending on geographic location.

As of January 2020, in Australia, 46.8% of senior teaching positions were held by women. In Europe, that percentage was much lower. In the Netherlands, for example, only 18.7% of these same senior teaching positions were held by women. In the best case, the UK, the percentage was 26.4%<sup>26</sup>. The differences are even

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24 Kate Whiting. Women were awarded more PhDs in the US than men last year. World Economic Forum (October 2018) <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/10/chart-of-the-day-more-women-than-men-earned-phds-in-the-us-last-year/>

25 Michelle L. Dion, Jane Lawrence Sumner, and Sara McLaughlin Mitchell. (2018) Gendered citations patterns across Political Science and social Science methodology fields. *Political Analysis* 26(3), 312-327.

26 Catalyst. Quick Take: Women in Academia (January 2020) <https://www.catalyst.org/research/women-in-academia/>

more worrisome when looking at the disparities between Latina women, Afro-descendants, and women of Asian descent.

In the case of Venezuela, Daissy Marcano<sup>27</sup> mentions that, although there are no impediments nor there is explicit exclusion of women in the academic field, the representation of women in universities and in high positions in the academic and scientific fields is still low. However, it must be taken into account that this variation in academic staff and the number of female academics varies depending on the university and over time. Carolina Jaimes Branger<sup>28</sup> writes about the domination of men in the National Academies of Venezuela, in total disregard of women with studies and with merits worthy of being recognized as members. Jaimes Branger even corroborates important numbers to understand the imbalance that exists between men and women in the Venezuelan National Academies.

In the Academy of Physics, Mathematics and Natural Sciences there are 17 men out of a total of 24 members. In the Academy of Letters, there are 15 men out of 22 individuals. In the Academy of History, there are 18 men out of a total of 25 members. In the National Academy of Economic Sciences, there are 11 men and 4 women [...] The worst are the Academy of Political and Social Sciences and the Academy of Engineering and Habitat, where out of a total of 35

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27 Daissy Marcano, "Análisis de la equidad de género en las actividades académicas en Venezuela", *PNUD* (2020).

28 Carolina Jaimes Branger, "La escasez de mujeres en las Academias venezolanas", *Termómetro Nacional* (May 2021) <https://www.termometronacional.com/opinion/la-escasez-de-mujeres-en-las-academias-venezolanas/>

individuals, 32 are men, as well as the Academy of Medicine, where there are 35 men out of a total of 40 individuals.

These numbers are not unrelated to those presented in 2015 by the Inter-American Network of Academies of Sciences, where the percentage of women in Venezuelan academies was below 15%<sup>29</sup>. The lack of presence of women in the National Academies is difficult to understand considering the long road that women have gone through not only to access higher education, but also their achievements. As Edda Samudio points out<sup>30</sup>, women's access to higher education occurred gradually in the late 19th century, early 20th century; several female pioneers in their areas would then pave the way for other women within the academy. Women like María Oquendo, Luisa Amelia Pérez Perozo, Lya Imber de Coronil, Margot Benacerraf, were among the first Venezuelan women to obtain university degrees in diverse areas such as education, law, medicine, philosophy and literature<sup>31</sup>. Women have trained and have managed to excel in different areas, including agronomy, biology, computing, physics, geology, geochemistry, mathematics, medicine, chemistry<sup>32</sup>. However, their names are hardly ever mentioned.

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29 Interamerican Network of Academies of Sciences. "Survey of women in the academies of the Americas." (May 2015) [https://www.ancefn.org.ar/user/files/SURVEY\\_OF\\_WOMEN.pdf](https://www.ancefn.org.ar/user/files/SURVEY_OF_WOMEN.pdf)

30 Edda Samudio. (2016) El acceso de las mujeres a la educación superior. La presencia femenina en la Universidad de los Andes. *Procesos Históricos. Revista de Historia y Ciencias Sociales*, 77-101.

31 Jackeline Fernández. Mujeres en la Academia: Pioneras que abrieron puertas para la transformación. *Prensa Aula Abierta* (March 2018) <http://aulaabiertavenezuela.org/index.php/2018/03/02/mujeres-en-la-academia-pioneras-que-abrieron-puertas-para-la-transformacion/>

32 Liliana López and María Antonieta Ranaudo. (2016). *Mujeres en Ciencia: Venezuela sus historias inspiradoras*. Academia de Ciencias Físicas, Matemáticas y Naturales. <https://www.ancefn.org.ar/user/files/Mujeres-en-Ciencias-final.pdf>

In Latin America, there are still very few universities that have a female deans. According to data from UNESCO<sup>33</sup>, in 2020, 18% of 475 public universities in the region had a woman filling such position. In the case of Venezuela, of 79 universities from across the territory, including experimental, non-experimental, polytechnic and private institutions, 16 women and 62 men were university deans in the year 2018<sup>34</sup>.

### **Venezolanas Investigan: How was it created and who is part of it?**

As in the academy, in politics and in the business world in various parts of the world, Venezuela is no stranger to debates and meetings where male voices predominate. Nowadays we see academic panels that include the voices of expert men but none of women or where female participation is clearly and constantly the minority. There are countless examples, including how universities, institutes and organizations continue to publicize events through different media, including social networks, in which the prevalence of men in panels and forums is evident.

Facing such disparity, in December 2020, the purpose of Venezolanas Investigan was presented in the media, as well as in Twitter. The call of Maryhen Jimenez Morales<sup>35</sup>, postdoctoral associate researcher at the Latin American Center of the University of Oxford, was to think and create networks of Venezuelan

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33 UNESCO- IESALC. ¿Dónde están las rectoras universitarias en América Latina? (March 2020) [https://www.iesalc.unesco.org/2020/03/07/donde-estan-las-rectoras-universitarias-en-america-latina-datos-de-unesco-iesalc-develan-que-solo-el-18-de-las-universidades-de-la-region-tiene-a-mujeres-como-rectoras/#YMY\\_-UwpBEY](https://www.iesalc.unesco.org/2020/03/07/donde-estan-las-rectoras-universitarias-en-america-latina-datos-de-unesco-iesalc-develan-que-solo-el-18-de-las-universidades-de-la-region-tiene-a-mujeres-como-rectoras/#YMY_-UwpBEY)

34 Daissy Marcano, "Análisis..."

35 Maryhen Jimenez Morales. Venezolanas Investigan. *El Nacional* (December 2020) <https://www.elnacional.com/opinion/venezolanas-investigan/>

female experts in order to not only make their work visible but also to bring together women with common goals and interests. María Corina Muskus, a human rights lawyer, heeded this call and together they decided to undertake a project that would later be called Venezolanas Investigan. I, Adriana Boersner, internationalist and assistant professor at the University of South Carolina Aiken, became part of the founding team and worked on launching the project, finally made public on December 1, 2020.

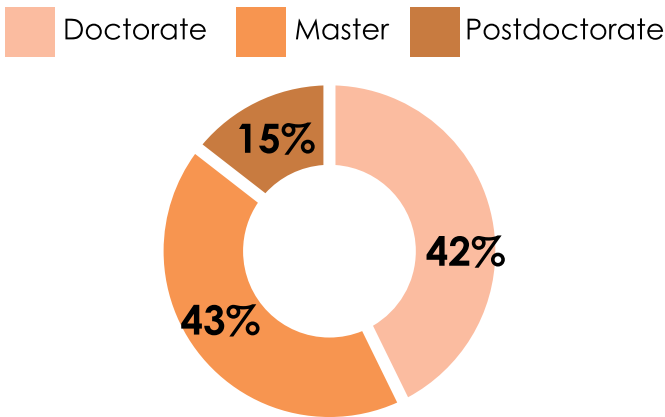
The founders of Venezolanas Investigan have carried out completely voluntary work to build a database –already public– so that journalists, organizations, companies, universities and governments can be informed about the work of Venezuelan experts in different areas. The goal is to continue adding the profile of more women to ensure that their perspectives and work are also heard and read. This database seeks to serve as one of many tools to guarantee the recognition and participation of female experts in conferences, panels, reports and researches. Likewise, we are progressively developing a list of publications, as well as of awards, events and achievements of these experts to make them visible through social media. It has been identified that men tend to cite men more often<sup>36</sup>, so we also seek to make visible the work of women who must be credited –as this article has done.

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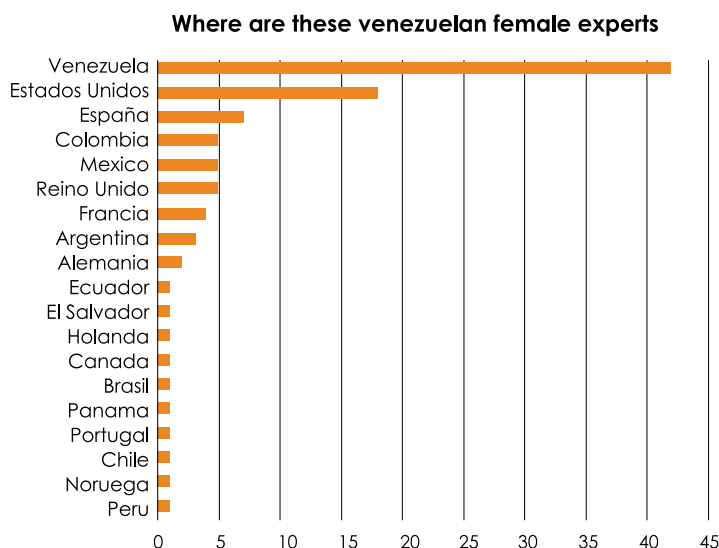
36 Dalmeeth Singh Chawla. (2016). Men cite themselves more than women do. Nature <https://www.nature.com/news/men-cite-themselves-more-than-women-do-1.20176>; Molly M. King, Carl T. Bergstrom, Shelley J. Correll, et al, “Men set their own cites high: Gender and self-citation across fields and over time”, *Sociological Research for a Dynamic World* 3 (2017): 1-22.

From December 2020 to the beginning of June 2021, the number of women in the Venezolanas Investigan database is 101. As shown in the graph below, the areas of study of the experts in Venezolanas Investigan are diverse. Of 101 experts, 43% have a master's degree, 42% have a doctoral degree, and 15% of the experts in the database have a postdoctorate. Most experts are in Venezuela, followed by Venezuelans abroad or in countries such as the United States, Spain, Colombia, Mexico and the United Kingdom.

### Academic titles of venezuelan female experts







The areas of expertise of the Venezuelans registered in the Venezolanas Investigan network are diverse, including academia and research, environment and climate change, anthropology, art, astronomy, astrophysics, biology, political science, computing, digital communication, consulting, human rights, international law, ecology, economics, education, epidemiology, business strategy, finance, gender, project management, history, law, literature, marketing, migration, journalism, politics, international relations, sexual and reproductive health, citizen security, sociology and tourism. The range of years of experience of these experts goes from five years onwards.

There are other alternatives that arose before and after Venezolanas Investigan that allow to appreciate the determination of women to participate in more spaces. Some other women's networks –not limited to Venezuelans– that readers can consult in Spanish, English and Portuguese, in order to learn about and read female experts in various disciplines, are:

- **Conectadas**<sup>37</sup>, a network in Spanish made up of more than 30 women and aimed at promoting forums and events where 50% of participants are women;
- **Mulheres Também Sabem**<sup>38</sup>, a Portuguese language network aimed at promoting the work of female experts in the areas of Social Sciences, Applied Social Sciences and Humanities;
- **Mujeres Referentes**<sup>39</sup>, made up of more than 200 Venezuelan women from various disciplines;
- **Red de Investigación de las Literaturas de Mujeres de América Central**<sup>40</sup>, a network that brings together female writers and researchers who seek to vindicate the work of Central American writers;
- **Red de Politólogas**<sup>41</sup>, made up of more than 350 women, experts in Political Science and Latin America;
- **Women Also Know Stuff**<sup>42</sup>, an English language organization and network that promotes women's work in political science. It seeks to help journalists find women who are experts in political science to interview them in the news;

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37 See Conectadas: <https://conectadas.org>

38 See Mulheres Também Sabem: <https://www.mulherestambemsabem.com>

39 See Mujeres Referentes: <https://mujeresreferentes.com/>

40 See Red de Investigación de las Literaturas de Mujeres de América Central: <https://rilmac.org/>

41 See No Sin Mujeres: <https://www.nosinmujeres.com/quienes-somos/>

42 See Women Also Know Stuff: <https://www.womenalsoknowstuff.com/>

- **500 Women Scientists**<sup>43</sup>, a network created to make women and gender minorities visible in the areas of science, technology, engineering and mathematics;
- **Foreign Policy Interrupted**<sup>44</sup>, a network launched in 2014 that seeks to bring together women who are experts in the fields of foreign policy, national security and other international issues.

## Final considerations

There is no doubt that there is a disparity in wages between men and women. Some believe that the harm that women suffer is simply a myth. Some ignore debates about the discrimination of women in different spheres of political, economic and social life by not judging them as necessary or important. Having one or two or three female colleagues or coworkers does not mean that they are truly being considered or that they do not suffer from prejudices, as proven by statistics that allow to understand that these women have managed to overcome several obstacles –among them, discrimination– in order to reach places that some have yet to do.

The absence of women in various fields has led more women and feminist movements to lead changes that contribute to the existence of more structural equality. These movements are not seeking to eliminate the voices or the perspectives of men. They are striving for the voices and perspectives of women to be respected and listened to.

As shown in these pages, Venezuela is no stranger to the absence of women in various fields. It also not a stranger to the

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43 See 500 Women Scientists: <https://gage.500womenscientists.org/>

44 See Foreign Policy Interrupted: <https://interrupttr.com/>

existence of movements and groups that seek to call attention to the importance of understanding the value and achievements of women. Venezolanas Investigan and many other platforms aim precisely to empower women, to make them more visible, and to include them in forums, discussion meetings, citings and interviews as experts, just as men have historically. We can all support this diversity of perspectives with small changes, such as when we refuse to continue attending panels, congresses and forums exclusively run by men; when we have the power to convene or interview experts, and we include the voices of men and women alike; when we refuse to only read men authors, while incorporating female writers as well, such as poets, historians, political scientists, essayists, among others.

# Conclusion

The fourteenth issue of *Democratización* comes to an end with the compilation of five articles that show how Venezuelan women have been opening spaces in society –and what is still to be done– to achieve equal conditions that allow their inclusion in public life and the end of serious injustices such as gender violence.

In the precarious social, political and economic context in which Venezuela finds itself, talking about feminism, gender equality, violence against women and women's participation in politics is not only a necessary act, but an indispensable one. The purpose of this issue is to contribute to the debate that is increasingly present in our society.

With this in mind, there are three ideas that can summarize and conclude this issue:

1. These texts reveal figures of inequality and violence against women. In this sense, we can conclude that the road ahead is still long and that we must continue working day by day for a more equitable and just society.
2. The fight must not be solitary or individual. We must work to join forces, to make our struggle visible, and to make both men and women aware of what we have achieved and what we want to achieve.
3. We must not be afraid to raise our voices, to express our opinions, to participate and to seize. There are many women in our democratic history. Their example and their struggle have helped to plow the field so that new

generations of women can have more rights and spaces for participation. Like Gloria Lizárraga de Capriles, let's not be afraid to take on new challenges, no matter how big.

4. Women must be an example and a sisterhood. An example for all those girls who are born, who grow up and who have big dreams every day so that they see in us the will, empathy, power, responsibility and courage that inspire and encourage them to fulfill their dreams. And a sisterhood, so that we help each other grow, supporting each other in whatever field we work in, as Adriana Boersner Herrera, Maryhen Jiménez and María Corina Muskus do with the 101 women who are part of the Venezuelan Investigan network.
5. And finally, in the words of Paola Bautista de Alemán, let us embrace our femininity and the benefits of our gender, turning them into an engine that drives us to continue fighting, breaking through and taking down barriers that exist in our society, because “it is wonderful to be a woman”.

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