

Democratization



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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 local¹: for example, through the Inter-American Convention on the Granting of Civil Rights to Women² adopted by the Organization

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

of American States (1948); the convention on the political rights of women³ approved in 1952; the convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women⁴ (1979); the declaration on the elimination of violence against women⁵ (1993); and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action⁶ (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

_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

the IPU and UN Women⁷, 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 States⁸ 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 countries⁹. In Venezuela, some women joined clandestine groups during Juan Vicente Gómez's dictatorship and fought later against Marcos Pérez Jiménez's¹⁰. Some even achieved the position of deputies during what is known as the Venezuelan democratic triennium

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 Venezuela¹¹.

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 numerical¹². 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”¹³.

Evangelina García Prince¹⁴ –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:

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 parties¹⁵.

In the local Venezuelan sphere, barely 18.2% of councilors were women by 2006¹⁶. 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

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%¹⁷, 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 192¹⁸. 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 Seven¹⁹ -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.

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 state²⁰. 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 Women²¹.

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 Castillo²². 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 women²³.

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 men²⁴.

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 colleagues²⁵. 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%²⁶. The differences are even

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 Marcano²⁷ 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 Branger²⁸ 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

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%²⁹. 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 out³⁰, 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 literature³¹. Women have trained and have managed to excel in different areas, including agronomy, biology, computing, physics, geology, geochemistry, mathematics, medicine, chemistry³². However, their names are hardly ever mentioned.

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

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 UNESCO³³, 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 2018³⁴.

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 Morales³⁵, postdoctoral associate researcher at the Latin American Center of the University of Oxford, was to think and create networks of Venezuelan

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

34 Daissy Marcano, "Análisis..."

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

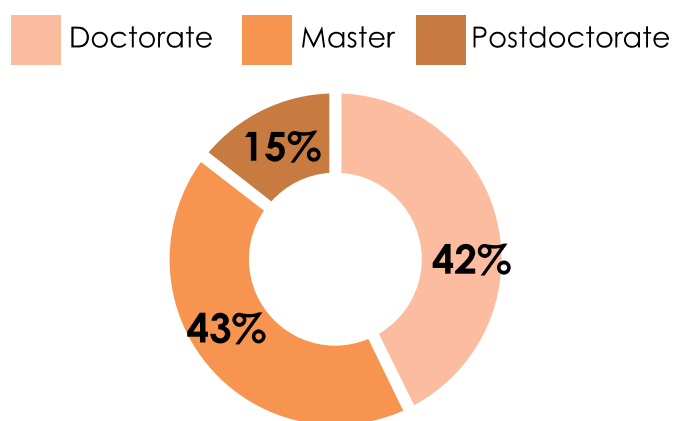
female experts in order to not only make their work visible but also to bring together women with common goals and interests. María Corina Muskus, a human rights lawyer, heeded this call and together they decided to undertake a project that would later be called Venezolanas Investigan. I, Adriana Boersner, 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.

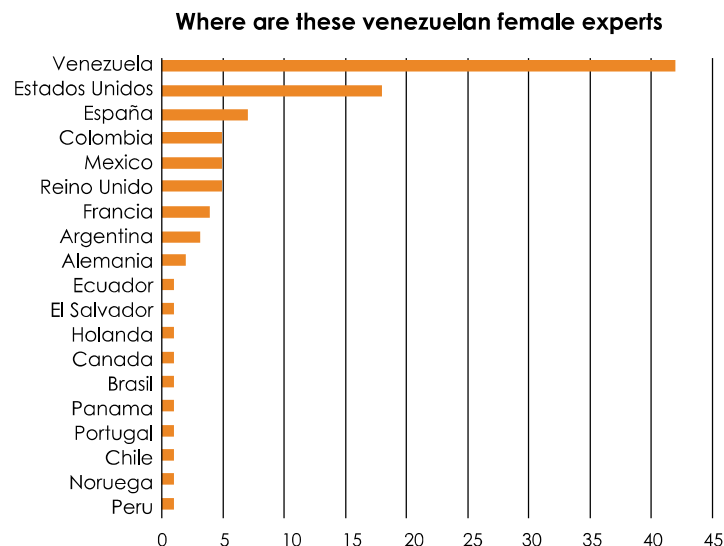
The founders of Venezolanas Investigan have carried out completely voluntary work to build a database –already public– so that journalists, organizations, companies, universities and governments can be informed about the work of Venezuelan experts in different areas. The goal is to continue adding the 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 often³⁶, so we also seek to make visible the work of women who must be credited –as this article has done.

36 Dalmeet 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**³⁷, 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**³⁸, 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**³⁹, made up of more than 200 Venezuelan women from various disciplines;
- **Red de Investigación de las Literaturas de Mujeres de América Central**⁴⁰, a network that brings together female writers and researchers who seek to vindicate the work of Central American writers;
- **Red de Politólogas**⁴¹, made up of more than 350 women, experts in Political Science and Latin America;
- **Women Also Know Stuff**⁴², 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;

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/>

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

- **500 Women Scientists**⁴³, a network created to make women and gender minorities visible in the areas of science, technology, engineering and mathematics;
- **Foreign Policy Interrupted**⁴⁴, 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

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

⁴⁴ See Foreign Policy Interrupted: <https://interruptrr.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”.