

GWL Voices Insights



Modest progress in Uruguay's subnational elections as representation in higher tiers of government remains elusive for women

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It has long been recognized that women's full and equal political participation and leadership is essential to building stronger democracies, achieving gender equality and driving progress toward sustainable development. Yet, 30 years after the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action called for removing barriers to ensure women's equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision-making, globally men continue to outnumber women by more than three times in executive and legislative positions¹.

Recent subnational elections in Uruguay held on the 11th May 2025, where local authorities for the country's 19 departments and 136 municipalities were elected, confirm this trend. Although Uruguay became the first country in Latin America to grant women the right to vote and to be elected in 1932², almost a century later this milestone has yet to translate into equal access to elected office with preliminary counts of latest elections showing that despite some progress in women's representation in mayorship positions, higher tiers of subnational governments continue to remain out of women's reach.

Women's representation in Departmental Governments (*intendencias*)

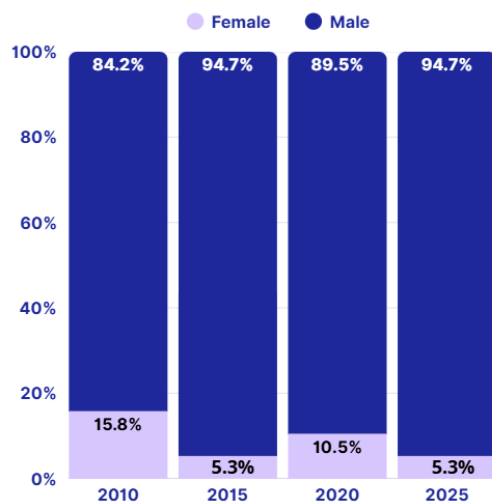
Women's leadership of Uruguay's departmental governments, equivalent to governorships, has been historically low. In fact, in Uruguay no female governors were elected until 2010, year in which the highest representation of women in governor positions was recorded to date - 3 women out of 19 governors were elected, representing 15,8% of the total³.

¹ UN Women (2025), *Press release: Political leadership roles in 2025: Men continue to dominate*.

² ONU Mujeres (2020). *Mujeres en el Territorio: Elecciones Subnacionales*.

³ *Idem*.

Elected Governors disaggregated by sex (2010-2025)

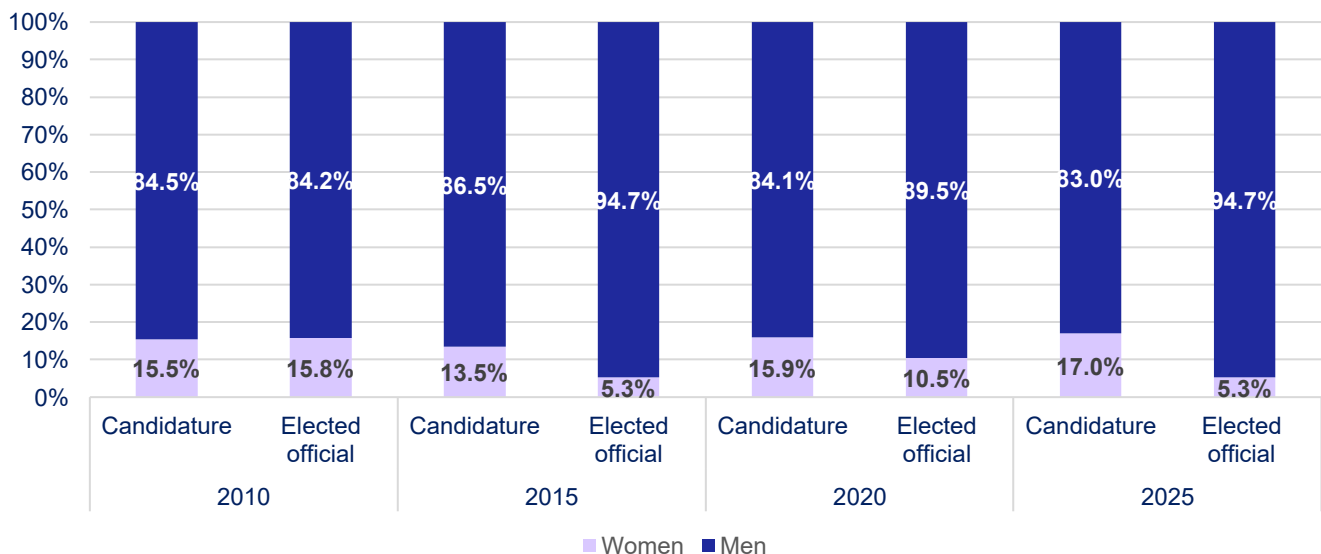


Fifteen years later, their representation in this position remains marginal with latest election results confirming a new setback in this regard. Only one woman was (re)elected governor out of a total of 19⁴, bringing us back to 2015 levels and demonstrating that women continue to face increasing difficulties in accessing leadership positions in these higher tiers of government.

The low number of women in party candidate lists could partly explain these results given that despite the existence of a Quota Law (18.476), implemented in Uruguay since 2014, that stipulates that parties must include "persons of both sexes" in candidate lists, the quota is not applied in single-person bodies such as governorships but rather only in alternate candidate

lists⁵. Indeed, despite the most recent departmental elections having more female candidates than ever, only 25 women out of a total of 146 contenders made the list, representing 17% of candidates⁶.

Candidatures and elected governors by sex (2010 - 2025)



⁴ El País Uruguay (2025), *Resultados de las elecciones departamentales 2025: minuto a minuto en datos y mapas por departamento de Uruguay*.

⁵ Demirdjian, Stephanie (2025), *Un lugar todavía reservado para los hombres: sólo una de las 19 intendencias estará encabezada por una mujer*. Publicado en La Daria Feminismos.

⁶ Cianelli, Mariana (2025), *Las candidatas mujeres a las intendencias sólo representan 17% del total de postulaciones*. Publicado en La Daria Feminismos.

Political Affiliation of elected female governors (2010-2025)



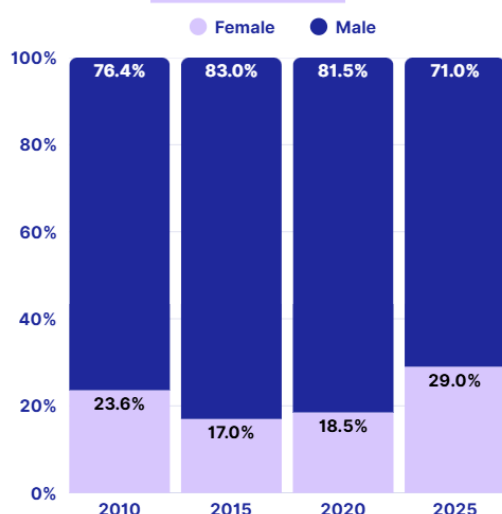
A further analysis of the characteristics of the only 7 women that have accessed this position since 2010 also reveals an average age of 52 years, suggesting extensive political careers to reach these higher executive positions as well as greater difficulties for women of reproductive age.

In terms of political affiliations, despite there being more women in candidate lists of the country's main center-left coalition party (Frente Amplio), surprisingly the majority of female elected officials represent the Partido Nacional, the country's main center-right party. This could point to the fact that women's access to these positions is not only conditioned by the overall low percentage of female candidatures but also because political parties put forward women

candidates tokenistically either in departments in which they are not competitive or in which they are faced against stronger male candidates of the same party⁷.

Women's representation in Municipalities: Mayorships

Elected Mayors disaggregated by sex (2010-2025)



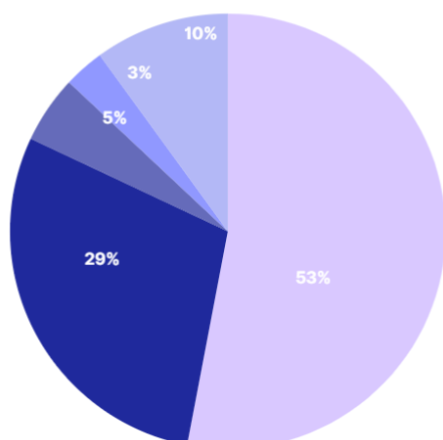
Following the 2025 elections, women's representation in municipal executive positions has experienced promising yet insufficient progress with women constituting 29% of elected mayors⁸. Although gender parity at this level continues to be far off, this figure is the highest recorded to date since 2010 when mayors were elected for the first time and represents almost a ten percent increase from elections held in 2020.

While this is encouraging, it worth noting that the vast majority of female mayors however - 87 percent in the latest 2025 elections - have been elected in municipalities with populations of less than 100,000 inhabitants, whilst five of the country's 19 departments will not have a single female mayor.

⁷ Idem.

⁸ Bartaburu, F & Alfredo Baliño, A. (2025). *El mapa de los municipios: qué partido y alcalde resultó vencedor en cada rincón del país*. Publicado en El País, Uruguay.

Elected female mayors by Commune Size - 2025 subnational elections



Political Affiliation of elected female mayors - 2025



In terms of political affiliations, as in the case of governors, the majority of elected female mayors (72%) pertain to political parties on the center right of the political spectrum.

On the other hand, the impossibility of accessing information on the ages of elected mayors indicates a concerning lack of disaggregated data on women's political participation in Uruguay that limits the possibility of delving further into the characteristics of elected women to determine whether younger – but also older – women are less represented in decision-making positions of local government bodies.

GWL Voices' Women in Politics Initiative

In 2023 the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women noted the country's low representation of women in the public and political spheres and the lack of measures to guarantee women's full participation in decision-making in their observations and recommendations to Uruguay⁹. Results from the subnational elections confirm this continues to be a stark reality.

Despite the modest yet insufficient increase in female mayors in the 2025 elections, women continue to be underrepresented at all levels of local decision-making in Uruguay, with the persistent generalized absence of women in governor positions confirming difficulties in their access to higher tiers of subnational governments.

Yet, in today's uncertain world increasing the representation of women, particularly of young women, at the municipal and regional level is critical. Not only because it builds more inclusive, stronger, resilient and vibrant democracies, but as an entry-point into politics it also lays the foundation for broader female participation in all spheres of politics. In the face of unprecedented pushback and reduced funding that threaten to reverse hard-won gains in relation to women's and

⁹ ONU Mujeres (2025), *Perfil de género y generaciones de Uruguay*.

girls' rights, promoting women's political participation and leadership represents a powerful strategy to counteract further rollbacks.

In light of this, and with the primary goal of promoting and enhancing women's representation and leadership in local governments, particularly in executive positions such as mayorships and governorships where women tend to be more severely underrepresented, GWL Voices spearheads the Women in Politics Initiative. An initiative that seeks to build the evidence base on women's leadership in subnational governments and strengthen the capacities of local women leaders by connecting and bridging multilateral and local processes and policies. [Read more here.](#)

***Claudia Briones Smith is GWL Voices' project manager for the *Women in Politics* (WIP) initiative.**