

BRIDGING THE LEADERSHIP GAP:

WOMEN IN LOCAL AND REGIONAL GOVERNMENTS IN LATIN AMERICA

Findings from the GWL Voices Women in Politics Initiative

BY CLAUDIA BRIONES SMITH



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ABOUT GWL VOICES **GWL Voices** is an organization of women leaders from all regions and backgrounds committed to building a gender-equal international system that effectively advances sustainable development, peace, security, and human rights. **GWL Voices'** almost eighty members leverage their voices and experience to shape and rally global leaders and public opinion to build a gender-equal international system that places women's rights and transformative power at the center. For more information, visit <https://www.gwlvoices.org/>.

ABOUT UNITED CITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS (UCLG) United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) is the world's largest organization of local, metropolitan, and regional governments. Amplifying their voices within multilateral processes, UCLG leads global advocacy for

local governance, democracy, and equality, while powering high-impact partnerships with UN agencies, international partners, civil society and grassroots organizations. Through a shared political mandate, knowledge co-creation and decentralized cooperation, UCLG advances caring cities and territories for a new social contract grounded in renewed, universal local public service provision. Together with locally elected women and feminist movements, UCLG facilitates the global Feminist Municipal Movement and supports safe and meaningful women's political participation, feminist leadership models, and local political agendas for equality.

ABOUT UN WOMEN UN Women is the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. Established in 2010, it supports Member States in setting global standards for gender equality and translating them into laws, policies, and programmes that deliver results for women and girls. UN Women provides normative, operational, and coordination support across the UN system to eliminate discrimination against women and girls, advance women's political participation and leadership, and promote gender-responsive governance, inclusive development, and women's economic empowerment. Through its global, regional, and country presence, UN Women works with governments, civil society, local authorities, and multilateral partners to strengthen accountability to international frameworks, including CEDAW, the Beijing Platform for Action, and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.



FOREWORDS

At a moment of profound global transition, the legitimacy of democratic institutions and the effectiveness of multilateral cooperation are being tested as never before. Across regions, we are witnessing declining public trust in governance, rising polarization, and growing questions about the ability of global commitments to translate into meaningful change in people's daily lives. At the same time, backlash against gender equality threatens hard-won gains and weakens progress toward more inclusive and representative governance.

In this context, women's political leadership at the local and subnational levels is not only a matter of justice or representation. These are the levels of government where public authority is exercised most directly, where rights are guaranteed or denied, and where democratic legitimacy is built or eroded. Yet women, who represent half of the world's population, remain profoundly underrepresented in executive leadership at these levels. This gap weakens the representativeness of institutions and narrows the range of perspectives shaping public decision-making.

Responding to today's governance challenges therefore requires more than incremental change. It calls for rethinking leadership pathways and creating conditions for women to lead where policy is implemented and experienced, while also ensuring that their experience informs the global commitments that frame collective action. It is precisely this local-global connection that the Women in Politics initiative of **GWL Voices** seeks to strengthen, by focusing on women's leadership in local and subnational executive office and linking territorial realities with global governance debates.

Developed within this broader effort and in partnership with United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) and UN Women, this publication brings together evidence, policy analysis, and the lived experiences of women leaders to inform policy dialogue and support efforts to strengthen women's leadership in local and subnational executive office.

When women lead from local territories to global decision-making spaces, democracies become more legitimate, governance becomes more responsive, and our collective future becomes more inclusive and sustainable.

Susana Malcorra

Former Foreign Affairs Minister of Argentina and President and Cofounder of **GWL Voices**

María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés

President of the seventy-third session of the General Assembly; Former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ecuador and Executive Director of **GWL Voices**

Local governments are the democratic institutions closest to people's everyday lives. They shape how public resources are allocated, and how rights are realized in practice. Ensuring that women participate equally in local executive leadership is therefore not only a matter of representation, but a prerequisite for legitimate governance. From the perspective of the Feminist Municipal Movement that United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) facilitates, it is even a prerequisite for the survival of democracy and the restoration of trust in the institutions which is quickly fading.

UCLG is proud to support this study as part of our long-standing commitment to gender equality and democratic renewal at all levels. Through our partnership with GWL Voices and UN Women, this research contributes essential, evidence-based insights into where progress has been made and where persistent gaps remain in women's access to local executive offices in Latin America. By combining robust data with the lived experiences of women leaders themselves, the study makes visible both structural barriers and transformative opportunities.

At a time when many of our frameworks are being challenged through more transactional than value-driven systems, this report is a timely call to action. A call to continue to protect rights and the principles of equality and solidarity that we need to define a common future through public policies that include all. Governments, political parties, international organizations, and civil society must adopt concrete measures that enable women to lead. Local service provision needs to include a care lens that goes beyond accessibility and tackles challenges such as political violence, gaps in access to resources, and obsolete institutional cultures.

UCLG calls on all stakeholders to use the findings and recommendations of this study to strengthen policies, foster accountability, and invest decisively in women's leadership.



Emilia Saiz

Secretary General, United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG)

Thirty years after the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action, a profound gap persists between the formal recognition of women's political rights and their actual presence in the spaces where decisions shaping our societies are made. At all levels—global, regional, national, and local—the underrepresentation of women continues to be normalized, sustained by discriminatory social norms, gender stereotypes, and structural barriers, including the disproportionate burden of unpaid care work borne by women, which limits their access to, retention in, and equal exercise of political power.

Seen in this light, parity democracy goes beyond addressing a historical debt to equality and justice; it is a prerequisite for institutions to respond effectively to a world marked by overlapping crises and emerging challenges. The digital transition and the advancement of artificial intelligence, the care crisis, climate change, and persistent inequalities demand new perspectives and innovative solutions. Addressing these challenges requires decision-making spaces to meaningfully include those who have been systematically excluded, thereby strengthening both the legitimacy and effectiveness of public policies.

Subnational levels occupy a strategic place in this process, not only because policies that directly affect people's daily lives are designed and implemented there, but also because it is at the local level where women's underrepresentation and violence against women in political life are often most visible. Despite these challenges, local women leaders—mayors, councillors, governors, and community leaders—sustain essential processes, drive innovative responses, and contribute to the development of their communities. Understanding their trajectories, the challenges they face, and the conditions that enable their leadership is critical for informing public policies and strengthening institutions committed to substantive equality.

This publication emerges precisely from this need. It is the result of a strong partnership between Global Women Leaders Voices (GWL Voices), United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), and UN Women, bringing together institutions committed to gender equality and women with direct experience leading local and national governments, as well as fostering partnerships and alliances across the multilateral system. This study not only provides rigorous evidence but also reaffirms shared convictions and commitments to advancing more diverse and democratic institutions in Latin America and the Caribbean and globally.

We trust that this publication will contribute to strengthening policy dialogue and opening new opportunities for advocacy to advance parity frameworks, prevent violence against women in political life, strengthen local gender equality institutions, promote comprehensive care systems, and improve the availability of disaggregated data, in line with General Recommendation No. 40 of CEDAW on the equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems. Ultimately, this work seeks to accompany and strengthen collective efforts to build more just, democratic, peaceful, and equal societies, leaving no one behind.



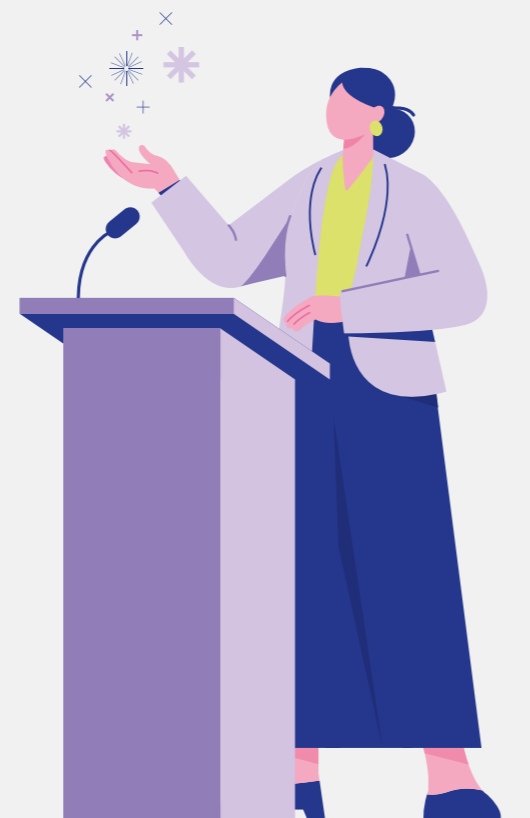
Bibiana Aido

Regional Director for the Americas and the Caribbean, UN Women

01

Part

Strengthening the Evidence Base on Women's Political Leadership	8
Introduction	9
Methodological Insights	11



02

Part

Women in Local and subnational Executive Office: Findings from Latin America	14
Overview of Women's Representation in Local and Subnational Executive Positions	15
Regional Trends in Women's Local and Subnational Executive Positions.....	16
Country-Level Analysis: Women in Local and Subnational Executive Positions.....	21
Chile: A Paradox of National Progress and Local Stagnation.....	21
Colombia: Legislative Gaps in Local Executive Representation	25
Costa Rica: Significant Gains Within a Comprehensive Parity Framework	29
Dominican Republic: Regression Amid Partial Parity Measures.....	33
Ecuador: Emerging Progress in Women's Local and Subnational Leadership.....	36
Panama: Stagnation Despite Progressive Legal Reforms.....	42
Facing the Barriers: Women's Realities in Local and Subnational Politics.....	45
Overview of the Survey and Respondent Profile.....	45
Characteristics and Motivations of Women Leaders	48
Barriers to Participation.....	50
Violence Against Women in Politics at the Local Level.....	55
Spotlight: Colombia - Care Responsibilities and Gender-based Political Violence as Structural Barriers to Women's Leadership	58
Beyond Representation: Women Leaders' Perspectives on Gender Equality and Democratic Governance.....	59
Outlook and Retention: Commitment Amid Persistent Constraints	61
Spotlight: Generational Differences in Women's Local Executive Leadership	62

03

Part

Key Findings and Recommendations for Action	64
Key Findings	65
Recommendations for Action	66

04

Part

Annex: National Legal and Policy Frameworks on Women's Political Participation	70
Bibliography	84
About the author	86



PART 1

Strengthening the Evidence Base on Women's Political Leadership

01

STRENGTHENING THE EVIDENCE BASE ON WOMEN'S POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

Introduction

The benefits of women's political representation have long been recognized not only as a matter of social justice but also as a cornerstone of democratic legitimacy and a driver of social and economic development. Global evidence shows that women's leadership strengthens inclusive decision-making, social cohesion and long-term progress. In particular, women's participation in decision-making has been directly associated with greater governmental responsiveness, transparency and effectiveness in advancing sustainable development and gender equality¹.

This correlation is supported by evidence indicating that women in politics are more likely than men to prioritize issues such as equal rights and non-discrimination, reproductive and sexual health, childcare and the prevention of violence against women². They also tend to give greater attention to broader social concerns, including education, welfare and healthcare, which benefit society as a whole by increasing labor force participation, enhancing productivity and fostering inclusive economic growth³. This orientation extends to the international sphere, where women policymakers have been shown to allocate fewer resources to militarization and more to international aid and social development⁴.

The **argument for women's full and equal participation therefore extends well beyond questions of numerical representation**. It concerns the transformation of political agendas and decision-making processes that help make democracy a lived and substantive reality. This understanding is reflected in General Recommendation No. 40 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, which establishes parity not merely as a target, but as **a democratic and human rights standard, necessary for the effective realization of women's rights and the functioning of inclusive governance across all levels of public life**.

This is **particularly evident at the local level, where governments serve as the primary interface between citizens and the state, delivering essential services that affect people's daily lives, shaping community priorities and translating national commitments into concrete**

action. When women are absent from these spaces, local policies and budgets often fail to fully reflect or respond to community needs, priorities and lived experiences, particularly those shaped by gendered inequalities. This is not because women hold a single or uniform perspective, but because **the systematic exclusion of half the population narrows the range of experiences, knowledge, and concerns that inform public decision-making**. Conversely, when women are meaningfully represented in local governance institutional agendas are more likely to be shaped by a broader spectrum of social realities. This expansion of perspectives can make decision-making more transparent, responsive, and accountable, strengthening institutions and fostering trust between governments and the people they serve.

Moreover, **local governments often serve as an important entry point into public life**, offering women their first opportunity to exercise executive authority and build political visibility. While pathways into leadership are diverse and rarely linear, **experience at the local level can expand women's access to networks, institutional knowledge, and public recognition that shape political trajectories across different spheres of decision-making**, from national politics to public administration and global governance.

The **demonstrated links between women's leadership and more gender-equitable policymaking underscore the urgency of expanding women's representation in political leadership**, particularly in the context of growing backlash against gender equality and women's rights and the risk of regression on hard-won gains. Yet despite these well-documented benefits, **three decades after the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, women continue to face persistent barriers to political participation and leadership at all levels**. Although progress has been made in recent decades, women's representation in executive and legislative offices worldwide remains significantly lower than that of men, who continue to hold more than three times as many of these positions⁵.

1. Women Political Leaders and Oliver Wyman Forum (2023), Representation Matters: Women Political Leaders.

2. UN Women (2024), Why so few women are in political leadership, and five actions to boost women's political participation.

3. World Economic Forum (2025), Why we need more women leaders in politics for the future of work.

4. The Global Institute for Women's Leadership and Westminster Foundation for Democracy (2021), Women Political Leaders: The Impact of Gender on Democracy.

5. UN Women (2025), Press release – Political Leadership Roles in 2025: Men continue to dominate.

This **inequality is equally visible at the local and subnational levels**. While globally women now account for more than three million representatives, or around 35.5 per cent of all members of local deliberative bodies⁶, **their presence in local and subnational executive positions such as mayors, governors or other equivalent leadership roles remains strikingly limited⁷. The scarcity of sex-disaggregated data on these positions further obscures the scale of the challenge**, concealing the structural barriers that hinder women's political advancement.

These gaps do not persist by chance. Deep-rooted **gender stereotypes** continue to shape public perceptions of leadership and political competence. **Discriminatory party practices, unequal access to campaign financing and media visibility, and the disproportionate share of unpaid care work** carried by women all constrain their ability to compete on an equal footing with men. In many contexts, women who do step forward face harassment, intimidation or **gender-based political violence**, both online and offline, simply for exercising their right to participate in public life.

Addressing these systemic barriers is not only essential to realizing women's rights, but also fundamental to the quality and legitimacy of democratic governance. **When half of the population is excluded or deterred from political participation, the representativeness, responsiveness and resilience of democratic institutions are profoundly weakened**. Expanding women's equal participation in political and public life is therefore both a democratic imperative and a prerequisite for achieving sustainable and inclusive development.

Recognizing both the transformative potential of women's leadership and the enduring gaps that continue to limit it, **GWL Voices works to ensure that women's voices and leadership are central to decision-making across all spheres of power**.

The global network brings together nearly 80 women leaders from 42 countries and diverse professional backgrounds, including former heads of state and government, ministers, heads of international organizations, and senior multilateral officials. It harnesses their collective experience to advance sustainable development, peace,

security, and human rights within a more gender-equal international system.

Among its flagship initiatives, **Women in Politics (WIP)** embodies GWL Voices' vision of transforming commitment into action. The initiative is **implemented in partnership with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (UN Women)**, the UN body responsible for promoting gender equality and women's empowerment globally, **and United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG)**, the world's largest organization of local, metropolitan, and regional governments.

Through this collaboration, the **initiative seeks to close the persistent gaps in women's political leadership at the local level, recognizing this arena as strategically pivotal for advancing gender equality and expanding women's participation across all spheres of public life**.

Building on the extensive experience of GWL Voices members in politics, diplomacy, and multilateral cooperation, the WIP initiative focuses on **strengthening the global evidence base on women in local and subnational executive roles, amplifying the transformative leadership of local women by connecting their priorities with global policy agendas, and driving high-level advocacy to make women's equal participation in local governance a core priority of the international democracy and development agenda**.

This **report presents the findings of the research carried out during the first phase of the Women in Politics initiative**, focused on strengthening the evidence base on women's participation in local and subnational executive leadership. The study was **conducted in six Latin American countries: Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, and Panama**, selected based on the availability of recent and comparable data as well as the timing of their local elections held in the second half of 2023 or throughout 2024. Together, these countries provide a diverse and timely reflection of regional dynamics, offering an updated and more granular understanding of women's representation in local executive positions across Latin American countries.

The analytical core of the report, presented in Part II, brings together both the quantitative and qualitative

dimensions of the research. The first subsection presents **updated data on women's representation in the six countries analyzed, focusing on elected local executive positions such as mayors and governors**. The data is presented at both the regional and country levels, allowing for comparative analysis and a clearer understanding of existing disparities and emerging trends. A distinctive contribution of this research is the **inclusion of age disaggregation**, which adds a valuable dimension to the analysis. This information, generally not readily available, **sheds light on the demographic profile of women in local executive roles and helps identify whether certain age groups face greater challenges in accessing these positions**.

The second subsection complements the statistical overview with **qualitative evidence drawn from a survey conducted among local women authorities across the six countries studied. The survey captures their first-hand perspectives on the barriers and obstacles that continue to hinder women's full and effective participation in local executive leadership, as well as the factors that have enabled their access to decision-making roles**. The insights gathered through this exercise provide a richer understanding of women's experiences in local politics and help contextualize the quantitative findings, highlighting the complex interplay of personal, institutional, and societal dynamics that shape women's leadership trajectories.

The report concludes with a third and final section presenting **key recommendations drawn from the insights gathered throughout the research**. These recommendations **aim to inform policy and legislative reforms that advance gender parity in local governance and, as a result, strengthen women's leadership across all levels of decision-making**. In addition, an annex provides a **concise compilation of national legislation related to women's political participation in local and subnational governments in the six countries covered**, offering a useful reference for ongoing policy dialogue and reform efforts.

The evidence presented in this report seeks to inform policy and decision-making processes that advance women's equal participation in political life, ensuring that women's leadership becomes not the exception but a defining

feature of inclusive democracies. In doing so, it aims to contribute to global efforts to strengthen democratic governance and promote societies where equality, justice and shared prosperity are the foundations of sustainable development.

Methodological Insights

Although significant progress has been made globally in tracking women's participation in local deliberative bodies through Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Indicator 5.5.1(b), **comparable data on women in executive positions such as mayors and governors remains scarce and fragmented**. Building on the Women in Politics (WIP) project's objective of strengthening the evidence base on women's political participation, this **report seeks to provide new and complementary evidence to help close this critical knowledge gap by combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to examine women's representation in local executive leadership across six Latin American countries: Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, and Panama**.

The quantitative research drew on all available public sources, a process that presented significant challenges. In several cases, official statistics provided sex-disaggregated information for elected authorities, while in others only the names of officeholders were available, requiring additional verification and analysis to quantify women's representation. With respect to **age-disaggregated data**, this information was **largely unavailable across all countries except Chile. Furthermore, data on other key variables such as political party affiliation, political background and experience, previous profession, and the size of electoral constituencies were not systematically accessible**. Additional dimensions essential to understanding women's political participation, including racial and ethnic identities, disability and re-election patterns, were also missing from available datasets.

As a result, addressing these gaps required extensive manual work to complement official data through the analysis of secondary sources. This involved reviewing campaign materials, media coverage, official websites, interviews and other publicly available biographical

6. UN Women (2025), Facts and figures: Women's leadership and political participation.

7. UN Women (2021), Women's Representation in Local Government: A Global Analysis.

information to develop a more comprehensive picture of women's representation.

Despite these efforts, data limitations combined with the scope and resource constraints of the project's initial phase meant that a fully harmonized cross-country database could not be developed at this stage. The **research therefore focused on the most comparable information that could be compiled across the six countries, prioritizing sex and age disaggregation as foundational variables and incorporating data on political party affiliation and the size of electoral constituencies as complementary dimensions.** This pragmatic approach ensured that the analysis remained both comparable and empirically robust while providing meaningful insights into broader regional trends and gaps.

While this methodological focus enhanced the coherence of the analysis, it was not possible to obtain complete age-disaggregated data for all elected mayors, particularly in Ecuador and the Dominican Republic. In these two countries, information that could have supported further disaggregation was not publicly available, and access to some datasets maintained by municipal associations remained limited for research purposes. The **challenges encountered in accessing even basic data highlight the need to further strengthen systematic, intersectional and comparable data collection by national, subnational and local institutions on women's political participation at the local level, as well as to enhance the accessibility of this information to support research and evidence-based policymaking.**

These limitations reinforced the importance of integrating **quantitative evidence as a core pillar of the research design**, enabling a more comprehensive understanding of women's experiences in local executive leadership and the barriers and enabling factors shaping their access to decision-making roles. To this end, a **survey was conducted across the six countries** analyzed as part of the Women in Politics initiative, led by GWL Voices in partnership with UN Women and UCLG. The questionnaire was **disseminated with the support of UCLG, through national and regional associations of local governments**, which played a key role in facilitating broad and inclusive outreach among locally elected women, as well as in strengthening their collective representation and networks.

The questionnaire was designed to capture not only gender- and age-related patterns, but also other dimensions that shape women's political participation and experiences in office. In line with an intersectional analytical perspective, it **included questions that help explore intersecting inequalities related to race, ethnicity, disability, territorial contexts, professional backgrounds and socio-economic conditions, as well as political trajectories and the conditions affecting access, participation and retention.** This approach helped address gaps in available administrative datasets and enabled a more nuanced understanding of the diversity of women's leadership pathways and the differentiated barriers they face.

The **survey achieved a 32 per cent response rate**, with 101 of 311 women in local executive positions participating. Of these, **63 per cent completed the full questionnaire.** The relatively modest response rate may reflect a combination of factors. These include the general challenges associated with participation in online surveys, as well as the difficulty of directly reaching women holding local executive office. Moreover, the heavy administrative, political, and public representation demands associated with these roles, together with care responsibilities, which continue to be disproportionately carried by women, may have limited the time available for locally elected women to engage in such research initiatives. In addition, participation may also have been influenced by respondents' understandable caution when addressing sensitive issues such as intra-party discrimination, political violence, and family-related constraints, despite assurances that participation was anonymous and responses were treated with strict confidentiality.

Despite these constraints, **all available information provided by participants was used to ensure the most comprehensive analysis possible, with each survey question analyzed independently and all valid responses retained**, regardless of whether questionnaires were fully completed. As a result, the number of respondents varies across specific questions and findings, as indicated throughout the report. This **approach allowed the study to reflect the diversity and nuance of women's experiences in local executive leadership, providing first-hand insight into their participation in local politics and the complex realities that shape their leadership trajectories.**

As such, the **study represents one of the few systematic efforts to document women's participation in local executive leadership in Latin America.** Its value lies not only in generating new evidence on women's representation but also in drawing attention to under-documented issues such as violence against women in politics (VAWP).

Taken together, these **findings highlight the urgent need to strengthen not only data systems and institutional reporting practices, but also the policy and governance frameworks at both national and local levels that support women's meaningful participation and leadership in local government.**





PART 2

Women in Local and Subnational Executive Office:
Findings from Latin America



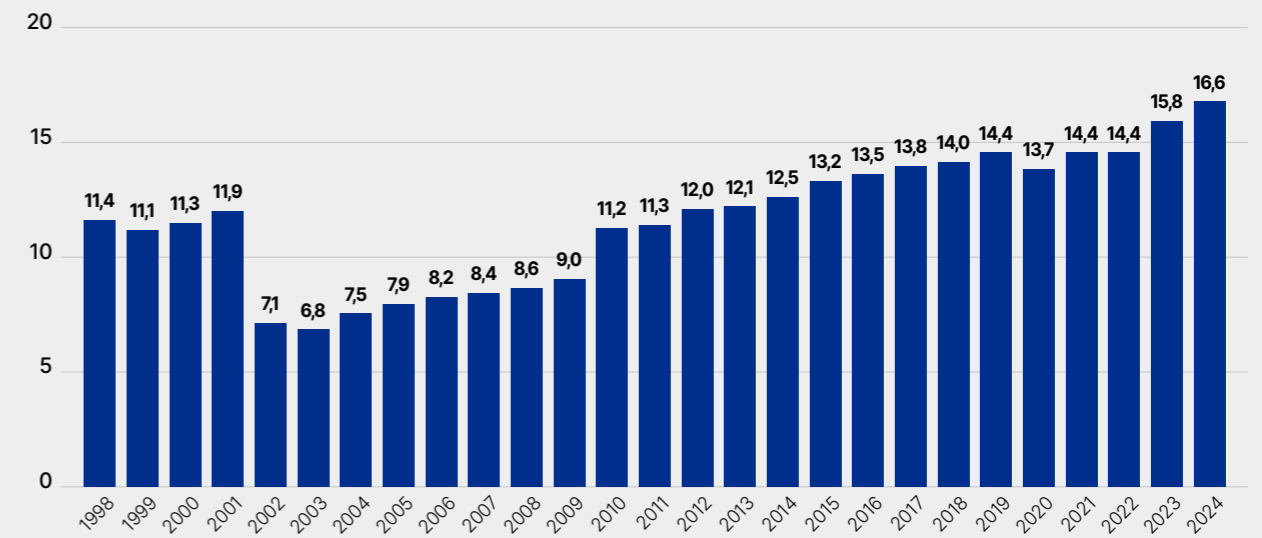
WOMEN IN LOCAL AND SUBNATIONAL EXECUTIVE OFFICE: FINDINGS FROM LATIN AMERICA

Overview of Women’s Representation in Local and Subnational Executive Positions

Despite strong global and regional commitments to gender equality, **women remain persistently underrepresented in local and subnational executive positions across Latin America.** The year 2024 was dubbed a “super election year,” with expectations that it would bring broad gains for women’s political participation. The results, however, tell a different story, with **recent regional data confirming that progress has been minimal.**

According to the most recent figures from the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), **women’s representation in mayorship positions stood at 16.6 percent in 2024⁸.** This represents an increase of less than one percentage point compared to 2023 (15.8 percent) and just over two percentage points over the last five years, a pace of change that stands in stark contrast with advances achieved in other spheres of decision-making, such as national parliaments and ministerial cabinets where, although still far from parity, women’s representation has grown more substantially.

Women elected as mayors in Latin America and the Caribbean, 1998 - 2024 (regional average, %)



Source: Developed by GWL Voices based on data from ECLAC (2025), Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean (GEO).

Against this backdrop, GWL Voices carried out a detailed analysis of women’s representation in locally elected executive positions across six Latin American countries: Colombia, Chile, Panama, the Dominican Republic, Costa

Rica, and Ecuador. The study, conducted during the first phase of the Women in Politics initiative, draws on the most recent electoral cycles held between late 2023 and 2024.

8. ECLAC (2025). Elected mayors who are women. Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean (GEO).

The analysis combines regional and country-level perspectives. The **regional overview** presents aggregate data from the six countries to capture the broader state of women's representation in local and subnational executive positions, while the country profiles that follow provide a more in-depth examination of national contexts, highlighting variations in women's access to leadership and the factors that may explain them. Taken together, these perspectives **offer a comprehensive picture of women's participation in local and subnational executive office in Latin America at a moment of renewed electoral momentum across the region.**

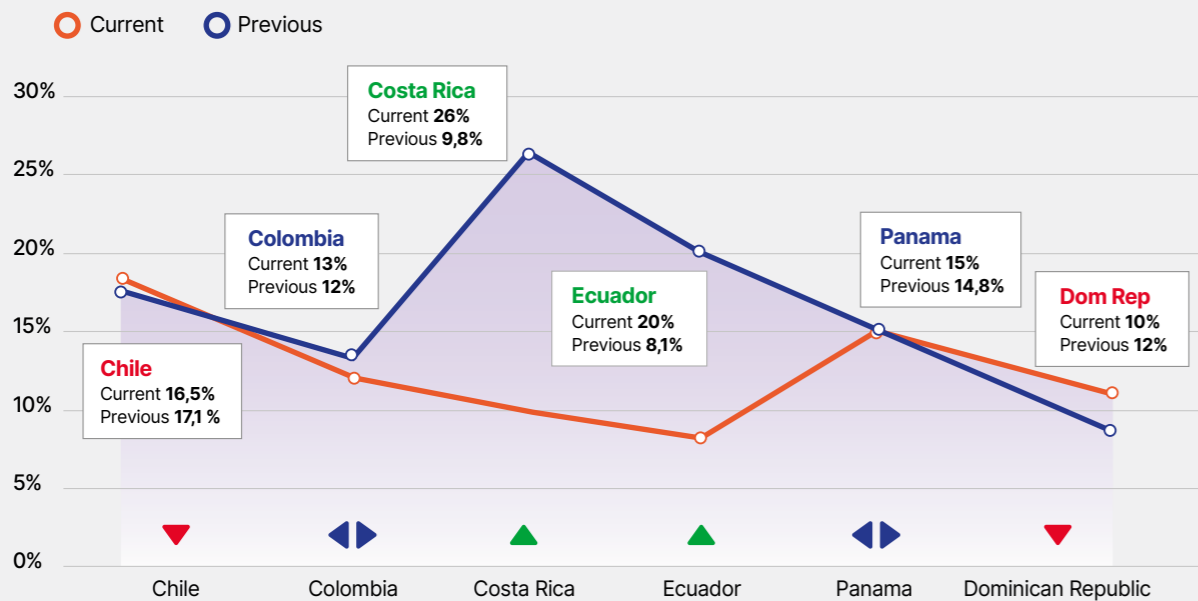
Regional Trends in Women's Local and Subnational Executive Positions

The **most recent local election results from the six countries analyzed reveal a sobering reality: as of 2024, women hold on average 17 percent of locally elected executive positions in these countries.** This represents

an **increase of only five percentage points compared with the situation four years earlier.** The figure is consistent with the regional average reported by ECLAC, which places women's share of mayorships at 16.6 percent in 2024. However, these **figures remain well below the 30 percent threshold reflected in some quota frameworks in the region and far from parity,** understood as equal representation of women and men, which international and regional human rights frameworks identify as essential to ensuring the full and equal exercise of women's political rights.

Progress has been highly uneven. Costa Rica and Ecuador stand out for having registered notable increases in women's representation during their most recent electoral cycles. In the **other four countries, however, the picture is one of stagnation or decline.** Colombia and Panama saw only very marginal changes in the proportion of women mayors between the previous cycle and 2024, whereas in Chile and the Dominican Republic, women's representation actually declined.

Change in the Share of Women Mayors in Selected Latin American Countries (Last Two Electoral Cycles)

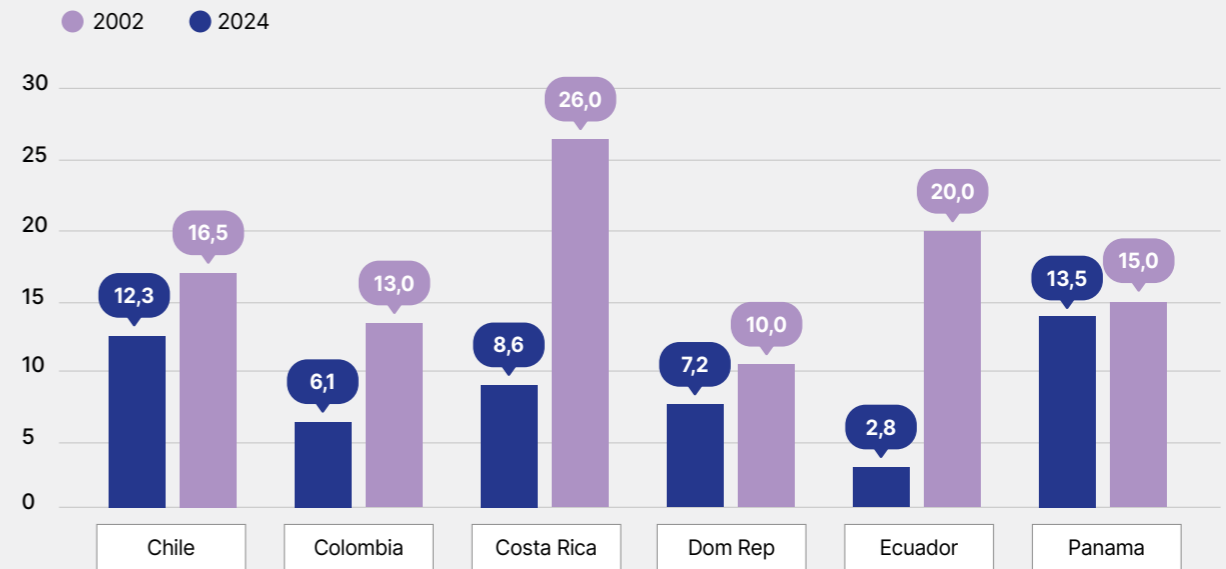


Source: Developed by GWL Voices based on official electoral data and data from ECLAC (2025), Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean (GEO).

When viewed over a longer time frame, the slow pace of change becomes even more apparent. **Over the past two decades, women's representation in mayoral positions across the six countries has risen by an average of only nine percentage points⁹.** Costa Rica and Ecuador again emerge as the countries showing the greatest progress, each recording gains of approximately 17 percentage points since 2002, likely driven by the advances recorded in their

most recent electoral cycles as a result of the application of regulations and mechanisms aimed at achieving parity. At the other end of the spectrum is Panama, where women's share of mayoralties has grown by only 1.5 percentage points over 22 years. This near-static figure underscores the depth of structural and cultural barriers that continue to limit women's political participation at the local level in some contexts.

Change in women's representation in mayoral positions (2002 - 2024)



Source: Developed by GWL Voices based on official electoral data and ECLAC (2025), Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean (GEO).

If the current rate of progress continues unchanged, gender parity in mayoral positions will not be achieved for another 85 years. That would place the **milestone somewhere around the year 2110**, more than 160 years after equality in public life was first recognized as a fundamental human right in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), and decades after subsequent international commitments¹⁰ were adopted to advance

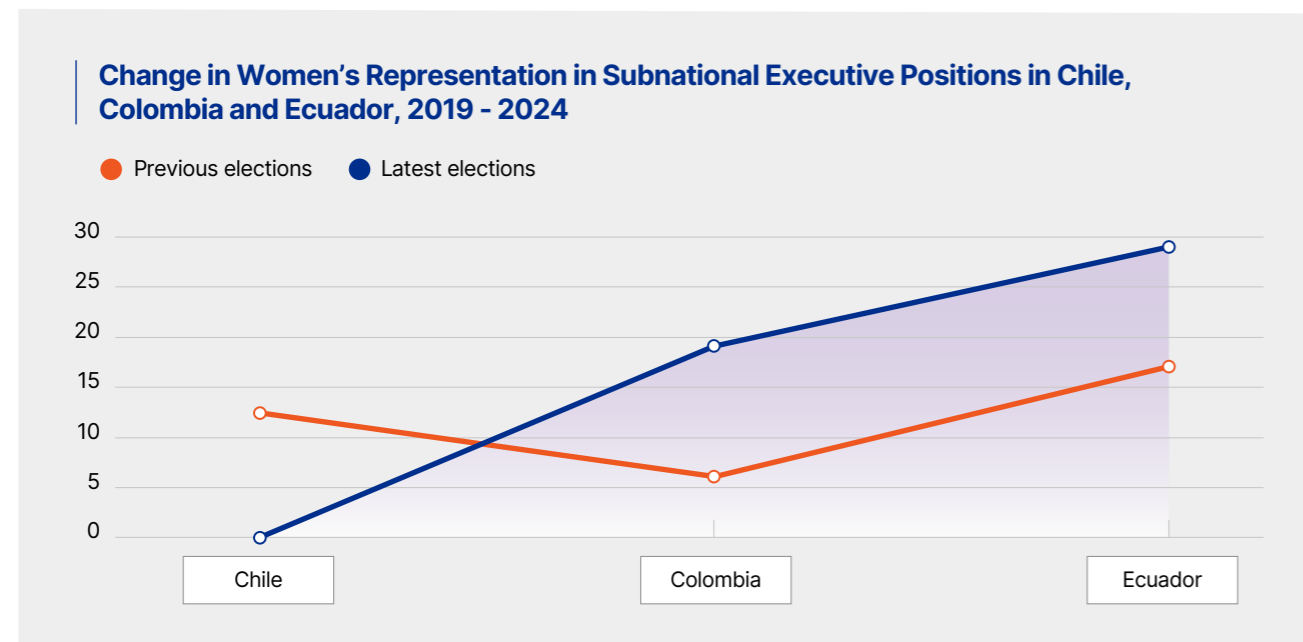
and guarantee women's political rights. This projection is not merely a statistical exercise but a **reflection of the inadequacy of existing measures and of the urgent need for more decisive action to dismantle the barriers that continue to limit women's access to local executive office.**

9. 2002 was used as the baseline for this analysis as it is the earliest year for which comparable data is available across all six countries. While earlier data exists for some countries, the year 2002 provides the most consistent reference point for cross-country comparison.
 10. Key international human rights instruments recognizing women's equal political rights include the Convention on the Political Rights of Women (1952), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966), and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979) and its subsequent General Recommendations.

The **situation at the subnational executive level follows a similar trajectory**, although the projected timeline to parity is somewhat shorter. **Between 2019 and 2024, the average proportion of women governors or prefects across the three countries where such positions are elected (Chile, Colombia and Ecuador) increased from approximately 12 to 16 percent, a gain of just over four percentage points in five years.** This progress was concentrated in two countries – Ecuador, where women’s representation in prefectural positions rose from 17 to 29 percent, and Colombia, where it increased from 6 to 19 percent. Chile, by contrast, experienced a reversal: in 2021, women held 12.5 percent of gubernatorial positions, but by 2024 none were elected. These divergent **outcomes underscore the fragility of progress in the absence**

of strong institutional mechanisms to sustain it, suggesting that, without significant policy interventions, parity in gubernatorial or equivalent positions will remain decades away. At the current pace, it would be achieved in approximately four decades, around 2065.

Even in countries where gains have been recorded, women’s participation in subnational executive leadership remains well below the commitments established in the Beijing Platform for Action and the more recent 50:50 parity standard outlined in General Recommendation No. 40 of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. This shortfall underscores the structural and institutional barriers that continue to limit women’s access to the highest levels of local executive decision-making.



Source: Developed by GWL Voices based on official electoral data.

The analysis also examined **age distributions across the six countries**, drawing on data that are not always systematically collected or publicly reported. The findings reveal a **clear generational divide, with age patterns among women in local and subnational executive office pointing to another dimension of exclusion.**

With the notable exception of Panama, where 59 percent of female mayors are under 40, women in local executive positions tend to be older, with an **average age of 47 years across the countries analyzed.**

The pattern is even more pronounced at the subnational level. In Colombia, 83.5 percent of women governors are over 40, while in Ecuador all women prefects fall within this age group. In Chile, both women elected as governors in 2021 were over 45¹¹. It should be noted that in Chile the minimum age to run for governorships is 30 years, introducing a legal restriction that formally limits younger people’s access to this level of subnational executive leadership. A similar age requirement applies in Colombia exclusively to the position of the Mayor of Bogotá (*Alcalde/sa Mayor de Bogotá*).

The concentration of women in relatively older age cohorts in these positions reflects barriers that operate throughout women’s lives but are particularly acute during certain stages. **Social expectations around women’s reproductive roles, assumptions about caregiving responsibilities, and biases about the level of experience required for leadership**—together with, in some cases, formal eligibility requirements— **all work to delay or prevent women’s entry into executive office during their younger years.** These norms are not unique to any one country but appear to operate across different political and cultural contexts within the region.

The generational gap in representation has consequences beyond the individual women affected. **Younger people as a whole are underrepresented in politics, but the exclusion is especially severe for younger women, who must navigate both age-related and gender-related barriers simultaneously.** None of the six countries analyzed has youth quotas or similar mechanisms in place for single-office positions such as mayors or governors¹². The absence of such mechanisms reinforces the age disparities observed and contributes to a political landscape in which **leadership at the local level remains concentrated among a narrow demographic.** In the case

of Chile and Colombia, minimum age requirements for certain positions further exacerbate these barriers. This lack of generational renewal not only narrows representation but also weakens the responsiveness and inclusiveness of local governance, underscoring the need for policies that promote both gender and age diversity in political leadership.

An examination of existing legal and regulatory frameworks related to women’s political participation¹³ across the six countries helps to further contextualize the electoral outcomes described above. **While all countries analyzed have adopted some form of gender quota or parity provisions¹⁴, their scope, design, and level of enforcement vary considerably, contributing to divergent outcomes in women’s representation in local and subnational executive office.**

Costa Rica has made notable progress following the adoption of comprehensive parity provisions in 2023, which apply to mayoral as well as other elected positions. Ecuador has also advanced by incorporating parity principles into its electoral system, with further progress expected following the 2025 reform of the Código de la Democracia, aimed at strengthening provisions on parity and alternation.

Panama, on the other hand, presents a markedly contrasting situation. Although the country introduced parity requirements in 2021, the most recent elections saw women represent only 19 percent of candidacies for local executive positions¹⁵, with the gap between legal text and electoral outcomes pointing to weak enforcement and the persistence of loopholes that allow parties to circumvent parity obligations without facing meaningful consequences.

Colombia and the Dominican Republic represent cases where quota frameworks exist but are either indirect or apply only partially to local executive office.

11. Since no women were elected as governors in the 2024 electoral cycle, the 2021 results are used as reference, when two women were elected to these positions.

12. While none of the countries analyzed applies youth quotas to single-office executive positions, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, and Ecuador do include youth-related quota or participation provisions for other types of positions, primarily limited to consultative bodies or binominal and multi-member electoral offices, and do not extend these measures to mayoral or gubernatorial races.

13. A detailed repository of relevant national laws and regulatory frameworks addressing women’s political participation, for each of the six countries analyzed is provided in Annex 1.

14. UN Women, 2025, Avanzar la democracia paritaria en América Latina y el Caribe.

15. UNDP (2025), Paridad política entre avances y desafíos.

In the Dominican Republic, gender alternation is mandated only for the joint ticket of mayor and deputy mayor, leaving the top position largely outside the scope of parity measures. In Colombia, while Law 581 requires that at least 30 percent of high-level public positions across all branches and levels of government be held by women, there are no specific quotas or alternation requirements for single-member elected positions such as mayoralties or governorships. Both countries have seen an increase in women's representation, but outcomes remain well below parity and quota benchmarks.

Chile, for its part, has not adopted parity, quota, or alternation mechanisms for local or subnational executive positions. As a result, women's representation has accordingly stagnated at the municipal level in recent cycles, while at the gubernatorial level it has experienced a clear setback, with no women elected in 2024.

What these varied experiences suggest is that legal frameworks matter, but their design and enforcement matter even more. **Parity and quota provisions can be effective tools for advancing women's political participation, but only when they are comprehensive in scope, rigorously applied, and backed by accountability mechanisms that impose real costs for non-compliance.** Where these conditions are absent, even progressive legal language may produce limited results.

Beyond electoral quotas or parity provisions, other aspects of the legal environment also shape women's opportunities in political life. **All analyzed countries have incorporated, to varying degrees, provisions addressing violence against women in politics (VAWP)¹⁶, recognizing it as a barrier to participation and a violation of rights.** Colombia, Costa Rica and Panama have adopted specific legislation to prevent and sanction gender-based political violence, while Chile and Ecuador address VAWP through their comprehensive gender-based violence laws. Ecuador also incorporates related provisions within electoral legislation and institutional regulations, as does the Dominican Republic. Despite these advances, the scope, specificity,

and enforcement of these protections vary considerably across countries.

Yet **care-related barriers remain largely unaddressed across the six countries.** Although Latin America has been a global frontrunner in advancing comprehensive care systems as part of broader gender equality agendas, these gains have not extended to the political sphere. **Measures specifically designed to recognize or reduce the burden of unpaid care work for women in politics are extremely limited.** Chile introduced a temporary childcare reimbursement for electoral candidates in 2021, a pioneering measure in the region, which was maintained for the 2024 elections. None of the other countries analyzed, however, has adopted similar support mechanisms¹⁷, leaving women to navigate political life while carrying disproportionate care responsibilities with little institutional accommodation.

The absence of targeted policies addressing care reflects a broader **gap in understanding how structural inequalities outside the formal political sphere constrain women's ability to participate on equal terms.** These constraints intersect with other mechanisms of exclusion, including violence against women in politics, which operates as a tool of intimidation and restriction on women's access to and permanence in political life. Until these issues are addressed alongside electoral reforms, the pace of progress in women's representation is likely to remain slow.

The country profiles that follow build on this regional overview by examining how these dynamics play out in specific national contexts. Each profile presents updated data on women's representation in elected executive positions, analyzes the legal and institutional frameworks that govern access to these roles, and identifies the factors that have either facilitated or hindered women's advancement. Together, they provide a nuanced picture of the state of women's political leadership at the local level in Latin America and the work that remains to achieve genuine equality.

16. UN Women, 2024, *Violencia contra las mujeres en política: marcos regulatorios e implementación. Una aproximación al escenario de América Latina y el Caribe.*
17. Colombia adopted Law 2436 of 2024, which establishes a maternity leave modality allowing women elected to collegial public bodies, including congresswomen, departmental deputies and municipal councillors, to exercise their political functions remotely during maternity leave. The law however does not extend to single-member executive office such as mayoralties or governorships.

Country-Level Analysis: Women in Local and Subnational Executive Positions

The regional data presented above highlights broad trends, but aggregate figures can obscure the specific political, legal, and institutional dynamics that shape women's access to local executive leadership within individual countries. The **country profiles that follow examine recent municipal and, where applicable, subnational elections in Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, and Panama.**

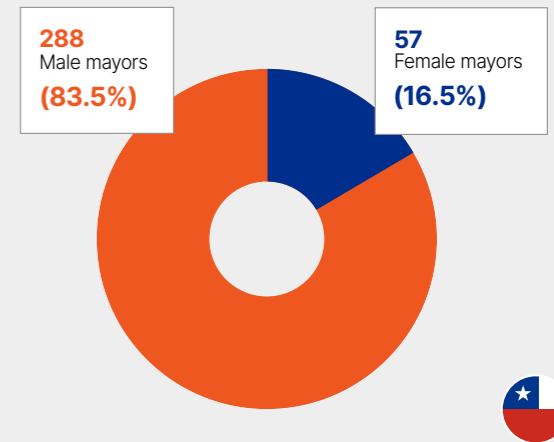
Each profile **presents updated data on women's representation in elected executive office and analyzes how electoral rules, candidate selection dynamics, and institutional frameworks shape women's pathways to local leadership.** These cases illustrate both the diversity of national trajectories and a set of recurring constraints that continue to limit women's equal participation in local executive office across the region.

CHILE: A Paradox of National Progress and Local and subnational Stagnation

Chile's 2024 municipal and gubernatorial elections were held on 26–27 October, followed by second-round runoffs in 11 of the country's 16 regions on 24 November. The elections unfolded against a backdrop of significant political and institutional debates on gender equality, including in the context of constitutional reform processes, which reinforced expectations of progress. The electoral outcomes, however, reveal a persistent gap between national policy commitments and women's access to local power. While Chile has implemented gender quotas for parliamentary elections and taken steps toward gender balance in the cabinet, **women's representation in municipal and regional executive office has not translated into sustained gains and in some respects has regressed.**

18. SERVEL (2024), *Elección de Alcaldes 2024.*
19. SERVEL (2021), *Elección de Alcaldes 2021.*
20. GWL Voices calculations based on data from ECLAC (2025), *Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean (GEO).*

Chile: Elected mayors (number and %) disaggregated by sex, 2024 - 2028

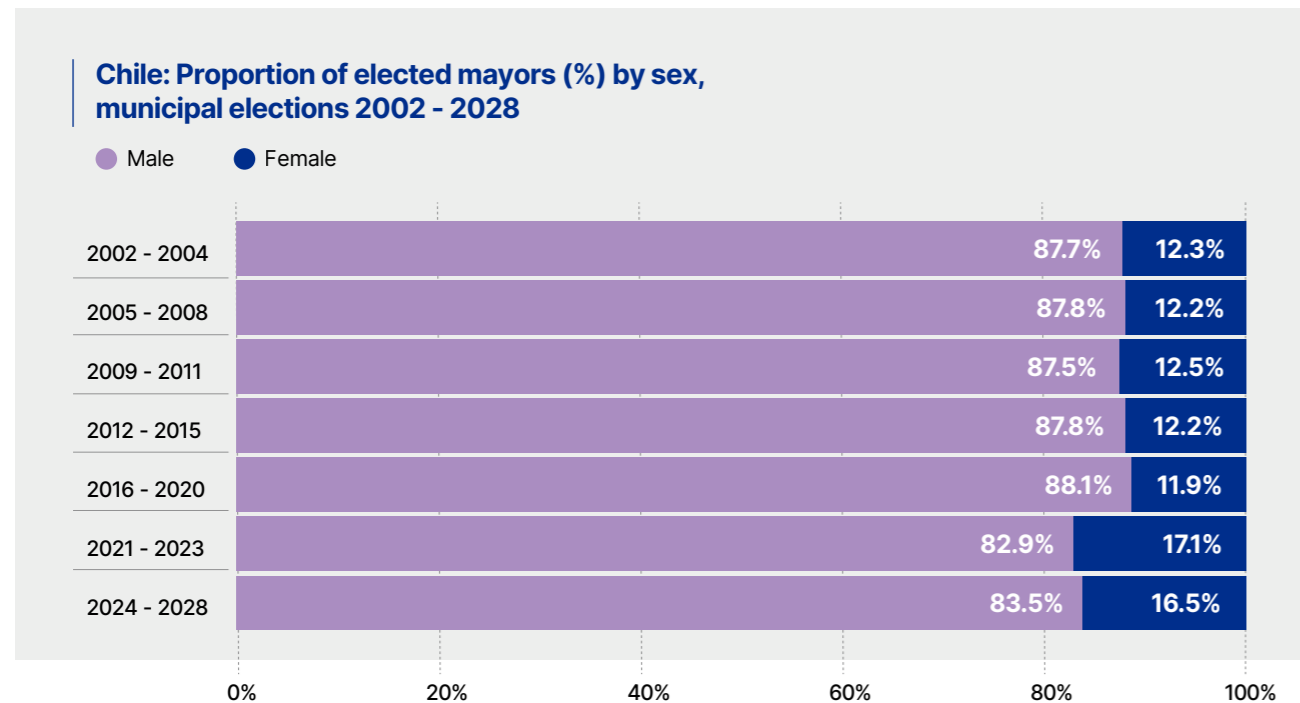


Source: Developed by GWL Voices based on official electoral data

Of the 345 mayors elected in 2024, only 57 were women¹⁸, a decline from 59 in the previous cycle¹⁹. This drop from 17 to 16.5 percent, though numerically small, carries symbolic weight: it **signals that even modest gains remain fragile and reversible.**

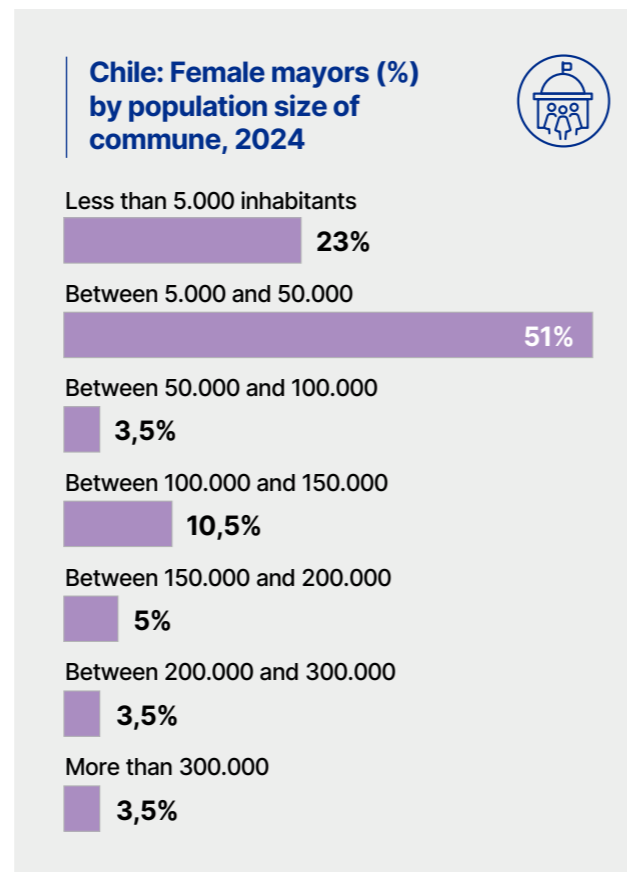
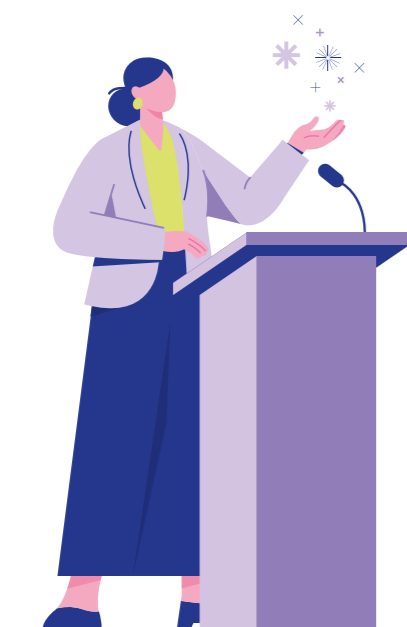
In over two decades, women's representation at the municipal level has in fact increased by barely four percentage points, one of the slowest rates of progress in the region²⁰.





Source: Developed by GWL Voices based on data from ECLAC (2025), Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean (GEO).

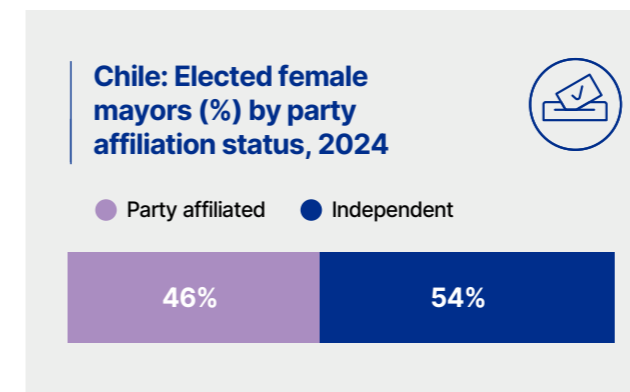
The **geography of women's political power in Chile shows a clear gradient by commune size. More than seven in ten female mayors (74 percent) govern communes with populations below 50,000, while their presence drops sharply in larger urban centers.** As commune size grows, and with it political visibility, media attention, and control over resources, women's access to executive office diminishes further. Only around 17 percent lead communes with populations between 100,000 and 200,000, and fewer than 7 percent govern those exceeding 200,000 inhabitants.



Source: GWL Voices elaboration based on own calculations from official electoral data

The 2024 results brought mixed signals from Chile's major cities: women lost leadership of Santiago, the capital and one of the country's most populous communes, but retained Viña del Mar, the sixth largest, and gained Valparaíso, the eighth largest, which elected a young woman mayor for the first time. Meanwhile, regions such as Arica y Parinacota, Tarapacá, and Ñuble are governed exclusively by male authorities, reflecting enduring regional disparities in women's access to local executive office.

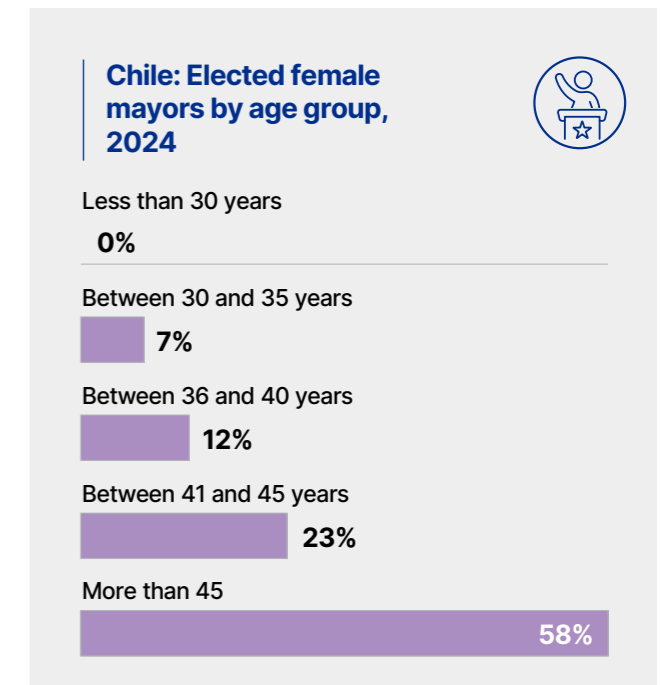
Particularly notable is the **sharp increase in independent candidacies among women elected to mayoral office.** More than half of these women, 54 percent, ran without party affiliation, nearly double the proportion from the previous electoral cycle. This shift reflects broader political fragmentation and mounting citizen disaffection with established parties, but it also suggests that women are increasingly finding pathways to power outside traditional party structures that have historically marginalized them. Among those who did affiliate with parties, representation was nearly evenly split between center-right (23 percent) and center-left (21 percent) coalitions, indicating that women's limited access to municipal leadership cuts across ideological boundaries.



Source: GWL Voices elaboration based on own calculations from official electoral data

Data from Chile's Electoral Service (SERVEL), one of the few bodies in the region to publish age-group aggregates for elected authorities, reveal a distinctly skewed age profile among women elected to mayoral office²¹. **The average age of female mayors in 2024 is 50, and nearly six in ten are over 45, highlighting a pattern in which younger women remain largely absent from local executive leadership.** No woman under 30 won a mayoralty, and only a small minority were under 40. In the Chilean context,

this generational imbalance reflects the cumulative effects of late political entry, limited pathways for young women within party structures, and the lack of institutional measures that might facilitate earlier participation. **Rather than an isolated trend, it reflects systemic conditions that narrow the pipeline for future women leaders at the local level.**



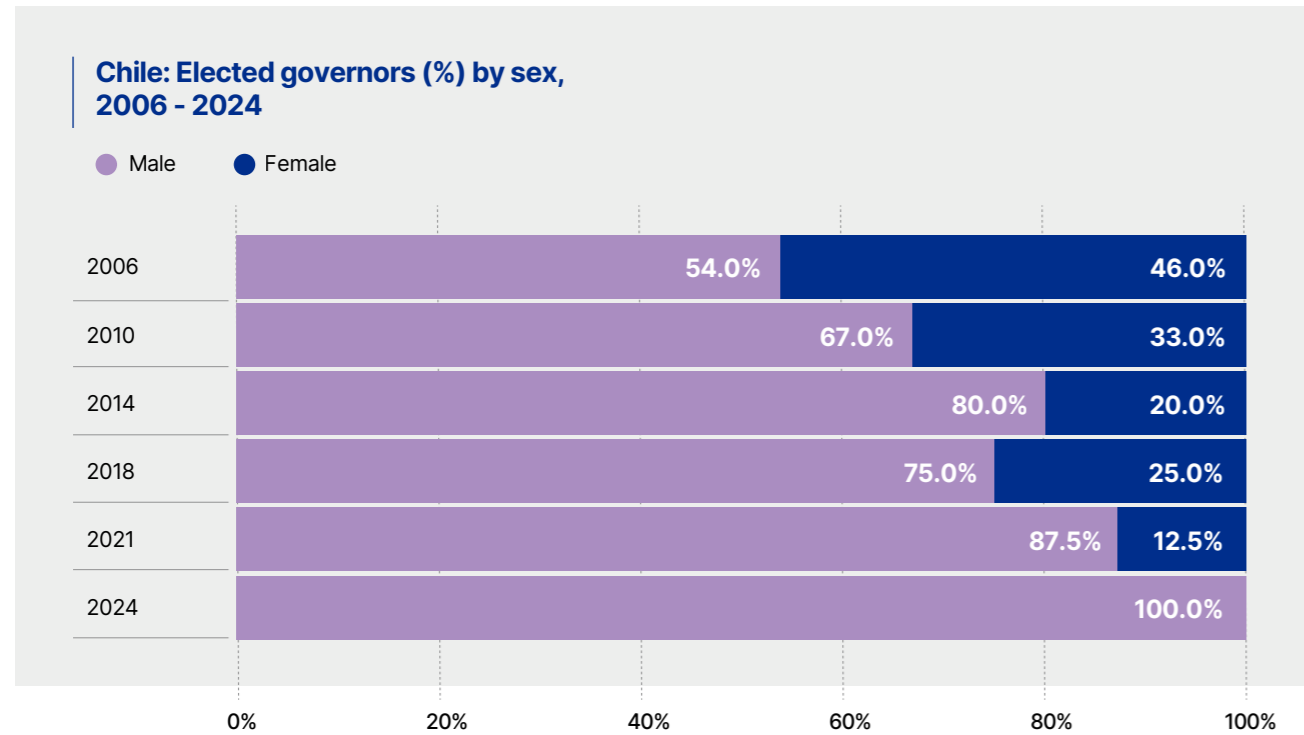
Source: GWL Voices elaboration based on own calculations from official electoral data (SERVEL) and Emol 2024.

If the municipal results were disappointing, the subnational outcomes were nothing short of alarming. In 2021, when Chileans first democratically elected regional governors, a process that coincided with the selection of a historic gender-parity constitutional body, only two of the 16 governors were women, representing 12.5 percent of the total²². This already marked a concerning decline from earlier periods when governors were appointed by the President. The 2024 elections eliminated even that minimal representation: not a single woman was elected governor²³. **Women, who constitute more than half of Chile's population, now hold zero percent of regional executive leadership positions.** The complete absence of women in the country's second cycle of democratically elected governors underscores the persistent and significant challenges women continue to face in accessing higher-level executive positions at the subnational level.

21. Exact ages of elected mayors were obtained from Emol (2024), El mapa de los alcaldes de Chile: Quiénes gobiernan cada comuna del país y cómo es la distribución de fuerzas políticas.

22. SERVEL (2021), Gobernadores Regionales 2a Votación 2021.

23. SERVEL (2024), Gobernadores Regionales 2a Votación 2024.



Source: GWL Voices elaboration based on own calculations from official electoral and government data (SERVEL and Ministry of the Interior).

These outcomes are closely linked to the structure of electoral competition and candidate pipelines. **In the 2024 municipal elections, men outnumbered women three to one among mayoral candidates**, 75.2 percent compared with 24.8 percent, and gender parity in candidate lists was achieved in only 10.4 percent of communes²⁴. **The pattern was even more stark in gubernatorial races, where women represented just 23 percent of candidates and four of the 16 regions fielded no female candidates whatsoever²⁵.** Without candidates, there can be no elected officials. **In the absence of legal requirements to ensure women's presence on ballots, parties have little incentive to challenge entrenched patterns of male political dominance.**

Chile's experience demonstrates that advances at the national level do not automatically cascade down to local governance. While Chile's constitutional and legal framework guarantees equality before the law and promotes political participation, including through provisions in political party legislation encouraging the participation of women and youth, these commitments have primarily translated into gender quota provisions for parliamentary elections and efforts toward cabinet gender balance.

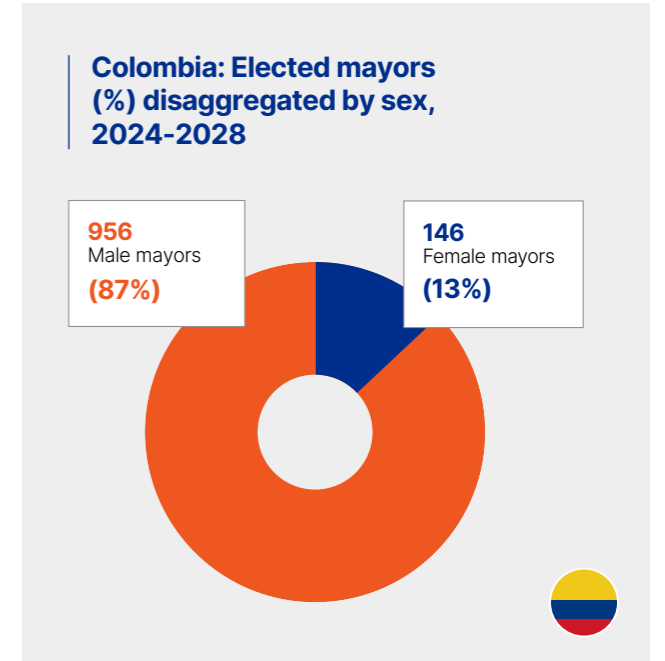
24. Asociación Chilena de Municipalidades (2024), ¿Quiénes son y qué los caracteriza?
 25. GWL Voices calculations based on data from Emol (2024), Elecciones 2024: Municipales y Regionales – Guía de Candidatos.

Even pioneering policies such as the childcare reimbursements introduced for electoral candidates in 2021, a regional first that was continued in 2024, have not translated into meaningful shifts in the dynamics that exclude women from municipal and regional executive office. Legal protections against gender-based political violence, incorporated into Chile's broader framework on violence against women in June 2024, represent important progress. Nevertheless, further measures will be needed to address the wider barriers that continue to constrain women's access to municipal and regional executive office.

Without translating national commitments to gender equality into targeted measures for local and subnational elections, progress in women's representation is likely to remain uneven and fragile. **Sustained progress will require reforms that address the rules and incentives shaping candidate selection and competition at these levels**, including mandatory gender parity requirements for candidacies, effective enforcement mechanisms, sustained care support measures, and expanded pathways for younger women to enter political life.

COLOMBIA: Persistent Gaps in Mayoral Representation and Advances in Governorships

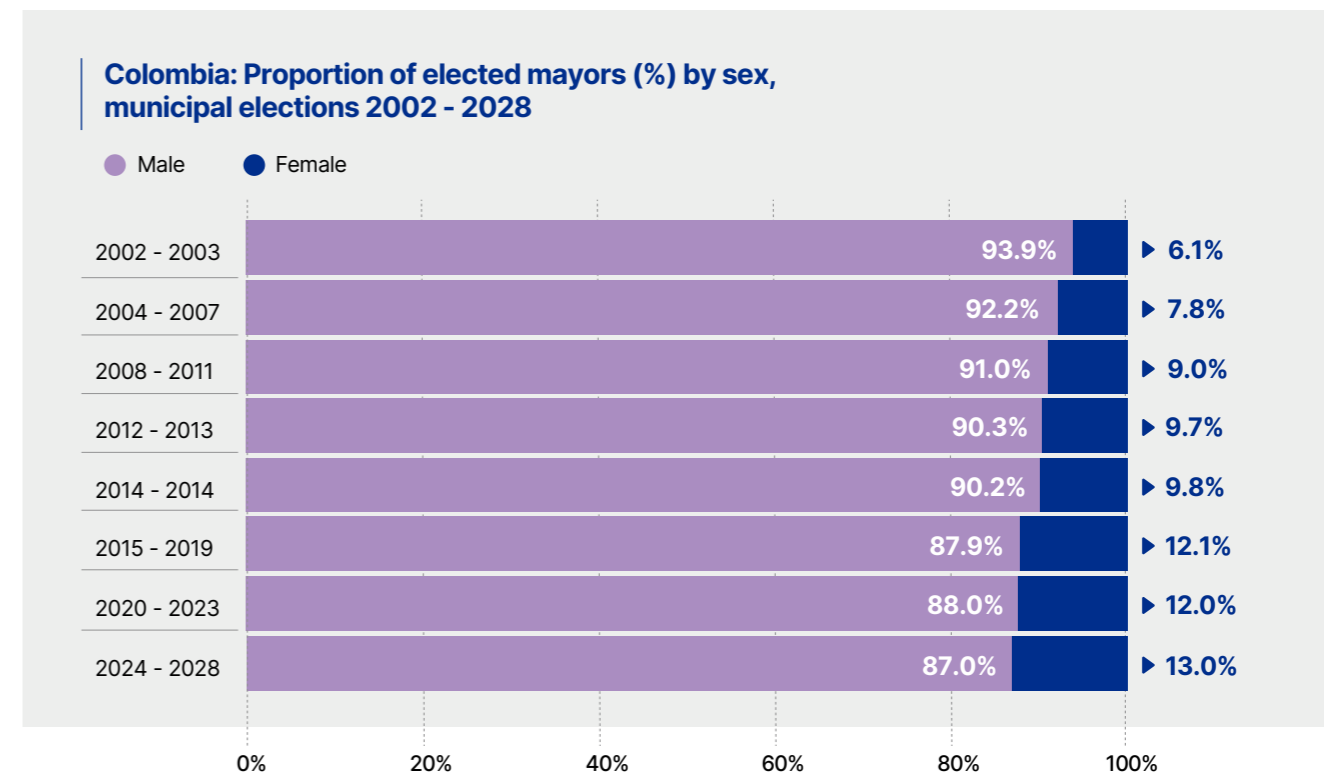
Colombia's 2023 territorial elections, held on 29 October, renewed authorities across the country's municipalities and departments for the 2024–2027 term, offering a timely lens on women's access to local and subnational executive leadership. Despite longstanding gender quota legislation and commitments to women's political participation strengthened in the context of the country's peace process, the **electoral results show that major gaps persist in women's representation. Of the 1,102 mayors elected, women secured only 146 positions²⁶, representing just 13 percent of the total.** This marks **only marginal improvement from the 12 percent recorded in the previous cycle²⁷.**



Source: Developed by GWL Voices based on official electoral data.

Women's representation in mayoral positions has grown by just 7.3 percentage points over two decades²⁸. This slow pace of change reveals a significant gap between

legal frameworks guaranteeing women's participation in some spheres of political life and their actual access to local executive power.



Source: Developed by GWL Voices based on data from ECLAC (2025), Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean (GEO).

26. Registraduría Nacional del Estado (2023), Elecciones Territoriales 2023: Alcaldes.
 27. Registraduría Nacional del Estado (2019), Elecciones Territoriales 2019: Alcaldes.
 28. GWL Voices calculations based on data from ECLAC (2025), Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean (GEO).

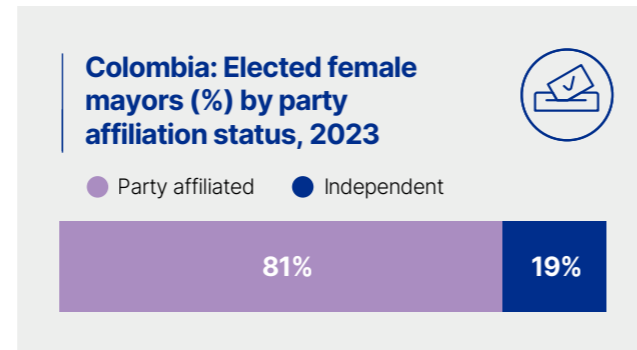
The geographic distribution of women’s municipal leadership in Colombia is similarly concentrated in smaller and less populated municipalities. The majority of female mayors govern municipalities with fewer than 50,000 inhabitants, while women’s presence declines sharply as jurisdiction size increases. Only a small number were elected in municipalities with over 100,000 residents, and even fewer lead medium-sized or major urban centers. The 2023 elections also resulted in reduced visibility in politically prominent areas. Women lost mayoral leadership in two departmental capitals previously headed by women, Bogotá and Cúcuta, retaining only Santa Marta through the re-election of its incumbent mayor. This territorial pattern illustrates how opportunities for women narrow in the spaces where political influence, resources and national visibility are most concentrated.



Source: Developed by GWL Voices based on official electoral data.

Unlike Chile, where independent candidacies have become a significant pathway for women, **Colombia’s political landscape remains structured by party dominance, and fewer than one in five elected female mayors ran as independents.** Instead, women were elected through established political organizations across the ideological spectrum, with representation in center-left,

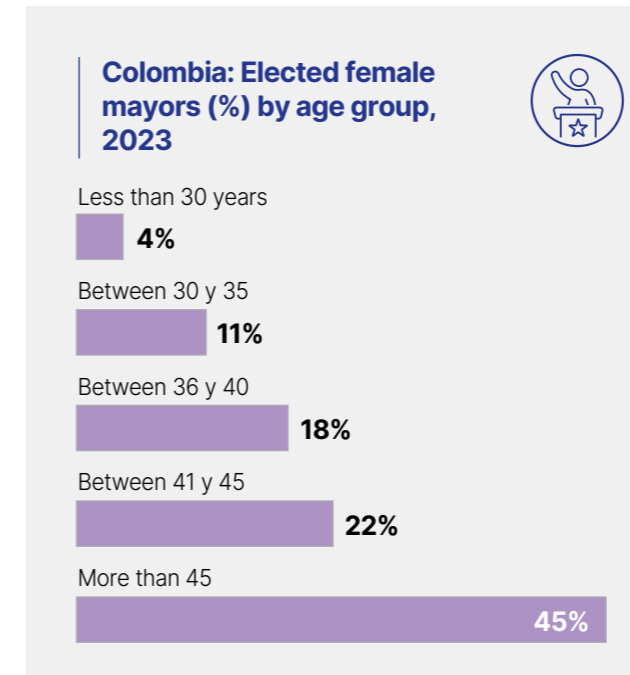
center-right, centrist, and mixed alliances. This **partisan diversity suggests that women’s exclusion from local executive office transcends ideology. Rather, it reflects structural factors embedded within party nomination processes and the legal frameworks governing electoral competition.**



Source: Developed by GWL Voices based on official electoral data.

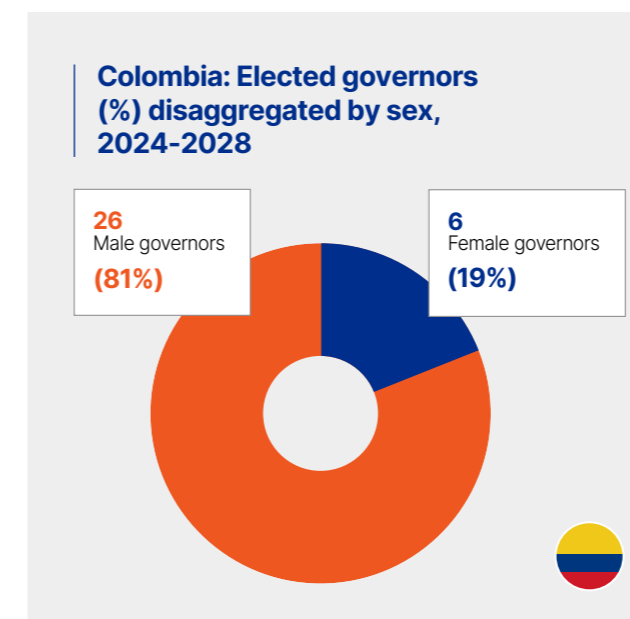
The age profile of elected female mayors offers further insight into the timing of women’s political advancement. **With an average age of 45 years, and nearly half (45 percent) aged 46 or older, women appear to reach municipal executive office predominantly in mid to later career stages.**

Those between 31 and 35 accounted for just over one in ten, while women under 30 made up only 4 percent of the total. This concentration suggests that accumulating political experience and credibility within party structures takes considerable time for women, delaying their entry into executive leadership even at the municipal level. It should also be noted that in Colombia the position of Mayor of Bogotá (*Alcalde/sa Mayor de Bogotá*) carries a minimum age requirement of 30 years, potentially limiting younger candidates’ access to one of the country’s most prominent local executive office.



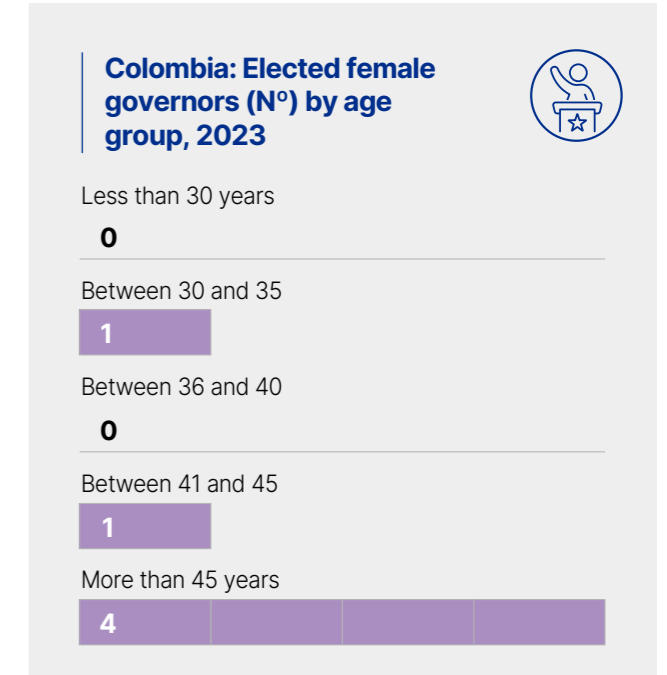
Source: Developed by GWL Voices based on data from the Colombian Federation of Municipalities (Federación Colombiana de Municipios).

At the regional level, the 2023 elections delivered more encouraging results. **Six women were elected governors out of 32²⁹, tripling their representation from two in the previous cycle³⁰ and raising women’s share of departmental leadership from 6 to 19 percent.** While men still hold 81 percent of these posts, **the threefold increase represents meaningful progress.** Particularly significant were the elections in Sucre and Chocó, which chose their first-ever female governors, marking important milestones in regional women’s representation.



Source: Developed by GWL Voices based on official electoral data.

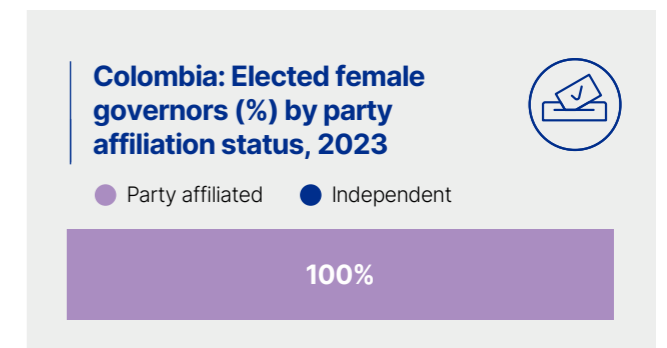
29. Registraduría Nacional del Estado (2023), Elecciones Territoriales 2023: Gobernador.
30. Registraduría Nacional del Estado (2019), Elecciones Territoriales 2019: Gobernador.



Note: Age distribution based on the six women elected as governors in 2023
Source: Developed by GWL Voices based on data from UN Women Colombia.

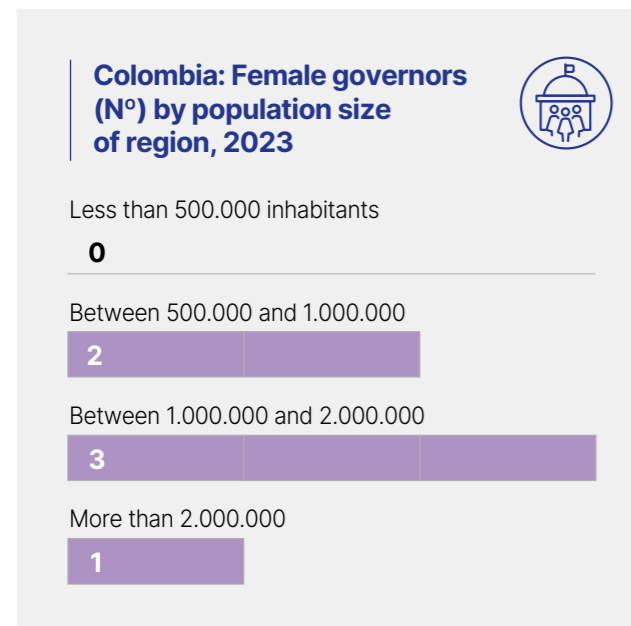
Yet even this progress reveals familiar constraints. **The majority of elected female governors (83.5 percent) were over 45 years of age, with only one in six below 40 and an average age of 51.**

In terms of political affiliation, the distribution diverged from typical regional patterns. **All elected women governors were affiliated with political parties,** with two-thirds associated with center-right coalitions, and one-third aligned with center-left groupings. This configuration contrasts with trends in other countries in the region where women’s representation more commonly emerges from progressive movements.



Source: Developed by GWL Voices based on official electoral data.

The **departments led by women vary widely in population**, from sparsely populated regions to those exceeding two million inhabitants. While the small number of cases limits conclusions, the **evidence suggests that women's electoral success at this level depends more on local political dynamics and individual standing within party structures than on ideology or demographic size.**



Note: Distribution by population size of region among the six women elected as governors in 2023.

Source: Developed by GWL Voices based on official electoral data.

The **disconnect between Colombia's legal commitments and electoral outcomes reflects a fundamental gap in the country's quota architecture.** Although Colombia has adopted constitutional parity principles, quota provisions for women's participation in public administration (Law 581 of 2000) and party candidate lists (Law 1475 of 2011), and more recent measures aimed at strengthening women's equal participation across public institutions (Law 2424 of 2024), these **advances do not extend to single-member contests such as mayoralties or governorships.** As a result, **these positions remain without parity requirements, alternation mechanisms, or other affirmative measures, contributing to women's limited presence both as candidates and as elected officials at the local and subnational levels.**

In addition, although the country is developing a National Care System (Sistema Nacional de Cuidados) under the 2022–2026 government agenda to recognize, reduce,

and redistribute unpaid care work, **measures specifically addressing care-related barriers for women's political participation remain limited.** Recent legislative steps, such as maternity protection measures for women elected to collegial public bodies, do not extend to single-member executive offices such as mayoralties or governorships, leaving these positions without comparable institutional support.

The consequences of these limitations are visible in candidate pools. In the 2023 territorial elections, **women accounted for only 18 percent of gubernatorial candidates and 16 percent of mayoral candidates**³¹, well below the 30 percent quota applied in other electoral contexts and far from parity thresholds referenced in Colombia's international commitments. In eight departments (Amazonas, Antioquia, Caldas, Caquetá, Guaviare, Norte de Santander, Putumayo, and Santander) as well as Bogotá, not a single woman was registered as a candidate for governor. The absence of female candidates in these jurisdictions predetermines electoral outcomes and illustrates how party nomination processes function in the absence of binding legal requirements.

Yet within this constrained landscape, signs of change are emerging. The number of women candidates for governor more than doubled between 2019 and 2023, rising from 20 to 45³², a 125 percent increase that suggests growing political ambition among women and possible shifts in party recruitment practices. Whether this momentum translates into sustained gains in elected representation will depend on the extent to which legal frameworks evolve to support women's candidacies and address the structural barriers that continue to limit their access to local executive power.

Colombia's experience highlights the **consequences of a quota architecture that does not extend to single-member executive contests.** While progress has occurred in some areas, women's access to mayoralties and governorships remains constrained by legal gaps and party gatekeeping. **Achieving substantive equality will require extending parity measures and enforcement to these offices, alongside institutional mechanisms that address the barriers women face in entering, sustaining, and advancing subnational political careers.**

31. Registraduría Nacional del Estado Civil y el Consejo Nacional Electoral (2023), Avances hacia la igualdad entre hombres y mujeres en los cargos de elección territorial: La representación política de las mujeres después de las elecciones territoriales 2023.

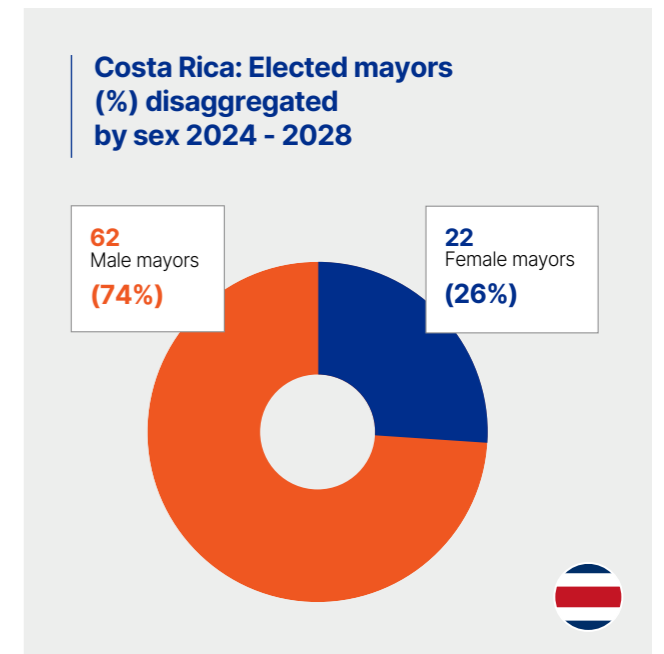
32. Registraduría Nacional del Estado Civil y el Consejo Nacional Electoral (2023).

COSTA RICA: Significant Gains Within a Comprehensive Parity Framework

Costa Rica's 2024 municipal elections took place on 4 February under one of Latin America's most comprehensive parity frameworks, renewing authorities across the country's 84 cantons.

With no regional tier of government, mayors represent the highest level of local executive leadership in the country, making these elections an important case for assessing how strong legal provisions can translate into substantive gains in women's representation.

The results delivered notable progress. Of the 84 mayors elected in 2024, 22 were women, representing 26 percent of the total³³. This marks a substantial increase from the previous electoral cycle, when women held only 9.8 percent of mayoral positions nationwide³⁴. This more than twofold increase reflects one of the sharpest short-term improvements observed across the six countries studied.



Source: Developed by GWL Voices based on official electoral data

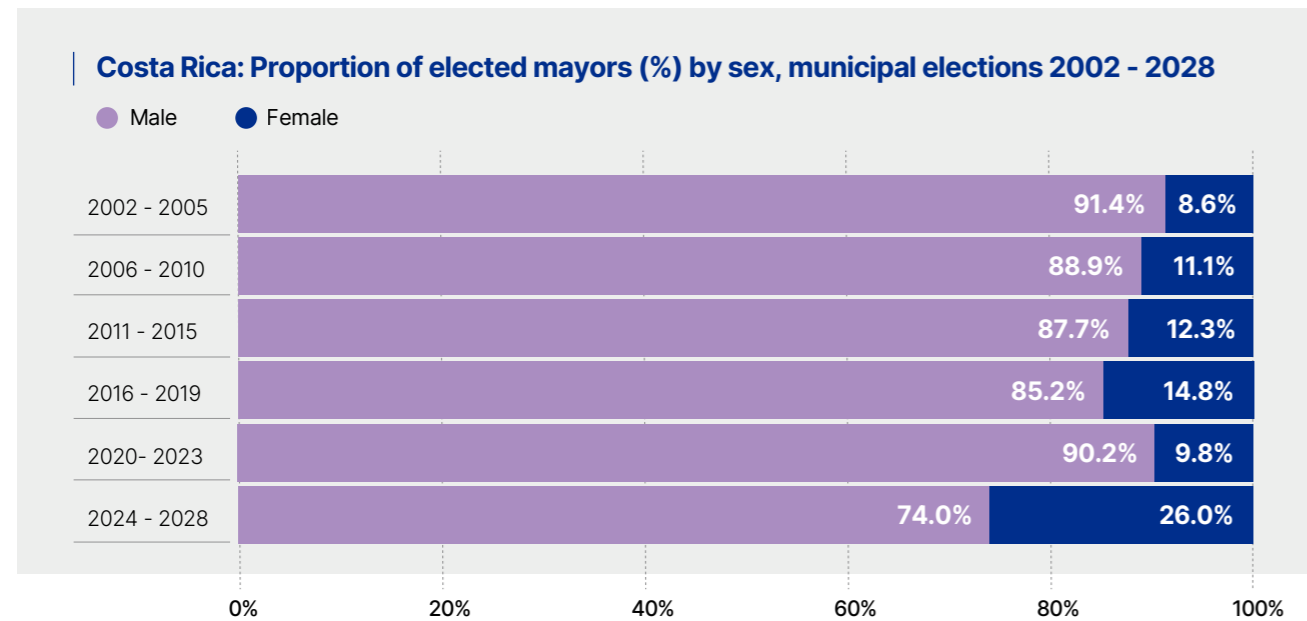


33. Tribunal Supremo de Elecciones (2024), Resultados Electorales: 2024.

34. Asociación Nacional de Alcaldías e Intendencias (2020), Informe de Resultados Elecciones Municipales 2020-2024: Alcaldías Municipales.

Over the longer term, women's representation in mayoral positions has increased steadily, rising from 8.6 percent in 2002 to 26 percent in 2024³⁵. The **17-percentage-point gain over two decades signals notable progress**, yet women still hold just over one in four local executive offices, underscoring that formal parity provisions have

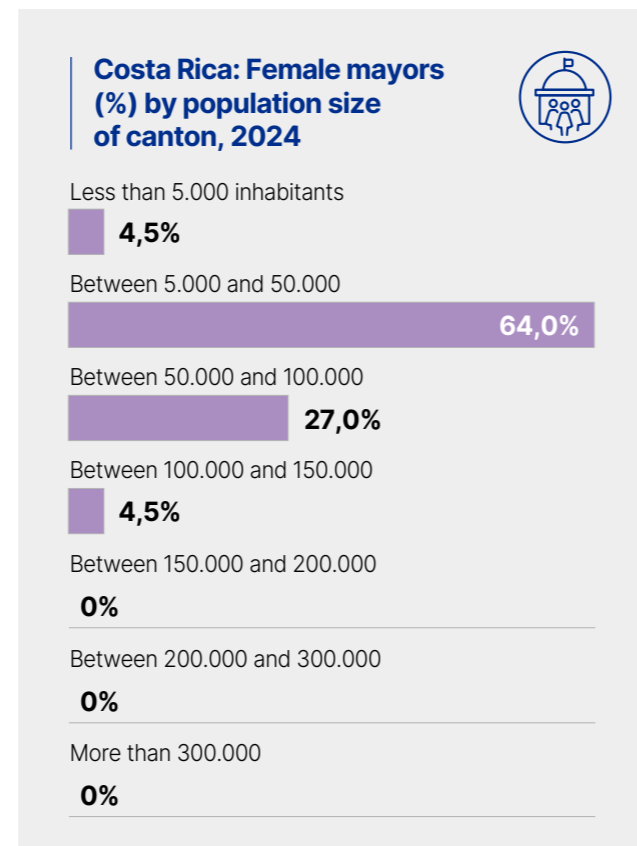
not yet translated into parity in outcomes. This is further illustrated by the gap between women's strong presence among mayoral candidates and their lower share of elected positions, pointing to factors beyond candidate availability that continue to shape electoral results.



Source: Developed by GWL Voices based on data from ECLAC (2025), Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean (GEO).

The geographic distribution of women's leadership in Costa Rica reflects a familiar **territorial imbalance in local representation, as women remain largely absent from the more populous cantons that carry greater political weight and administrative responsibility**.

Nearly two-thirds of female mayors were elected in cantons with populations below 50,000, while just over a quarter lead cantons between 50,000 and 100,000 inhabitants. Only one woman was elected mayor in a canton with a population exceeding 100,000. The absence of women in provincial capitals reinforces this pattern. Despite the overall increase in women's representation nationwide, none of Costa Rica's seven provincial capitals elected a woman mayor in 2024.



Source: GWL Voices calculations based on official electoral data.

35. GWL Voices calculations based on data from ECLAC (2025), Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean (GEO).

However, it is worth noting that several major cantons outside the capital tier, including Desamparados, San Ramón, Heredia, and Limón, elected women to lead their local governments. These outcomes signal **gradual but meaningful change in areas of greater population and political visibility, suggesting that women's access to larger urban centers, while still constrained, is beginning to expand**.

Political affiliation patterns among elected female mayors reveal a marked ideological concentration. **All women elected to mayoral office were affiliated with political parties**, with nearly two-thirds associated with center-left parties, while the remaining third aligned with center-right parties.

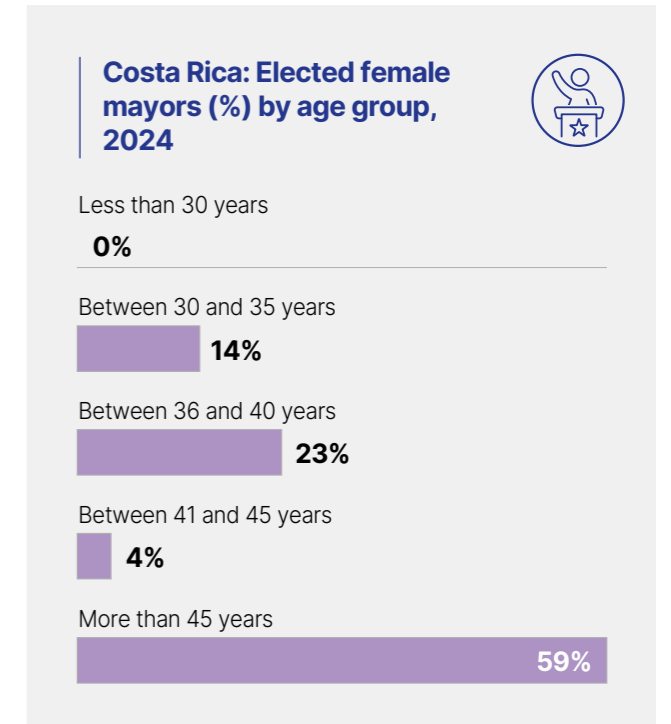


Source: GWL Voices elaboration based on own calculations from official electoral data.

This distribution reflects a broader regional trend in which women's representation tends to be stronger within political forces that have more systematically integrated gender equality principles into their internal regulations and candidate selection processes.

In relation to the age profile of Costa Rica's elected female mayors, the analysis reveals a **clear concentration in older age groups. Nearly six in ten were over 46 years of age, with an average age of 50**. Fewer than four in ten were under 45, and no woman under 30 was elected. As observed in other countries reviewed in this report, this **generational configuration suggests that pathways to local executive office tend to open later in women's political trajectories**, reflecting the persistent barriers that limit younger women's entry into positions of executive leadership.

36. La Nación (2024), Vea los Nuevos Alcaldes de Costa Rica.



Source: GWL Voices calculation based on data from La Nación (2024)³⁶.

The **gains observed in Costa Rica are supported by a legal and institutional framework for gender equality in politics that is among the most advanced in Latin America**. The Electoral Code (Law 8765), adopted in 2009 and updated in 2022, **requires that candidate lists and elected bodies comprise 50 percent women and 50 percent men, with alternation by sex to ensure that no two candidates of the same sex appear consecutively**. A 2023 directive from the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) further strengthened this framework by mandating the application of horizontal gender parity in party candidate lists for mayoral elections to ensure that women appear in competitive positions across all party slates.

Progress has also been made to strengthen protections against political violence. The Law for the Prevention, Attention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence Against Women in Political Life (Law 10235), adopted in 2022, specifically addresses gender-based political violence and explicitly recognizes that many of these acts occur at the most immediate levels of power, including municipal and district councils. This **legal recognition represents an important step toward creating safer political environments for women at the local level**.

The combined impact of these measures was evident in the 2024 municipal elections, when women’s representation among mayoral candidates reached its highest level in the country’s history. In total, 242 women ran for mayor, representing 43 percent of all candidacies³⁷. This milestone **reflects the tangible impact of strengthened parity requirements in nomination processes and demonstrates that when effectively applied at this stage, parity mechanisms can significantly expand women’s participation in electoral competition.**

Yet the **results also show that candidacy parity alone does not ensure parity in outcomes.** The gap between women’s share of candidacies and their share of elected positions points to factors beyond candidate availability that continue to shape outcomes, including voter perceptions influenced by gendered expectations of leadership, unequal access to campaign financing and media visibility, and inconsistent support from political parties.

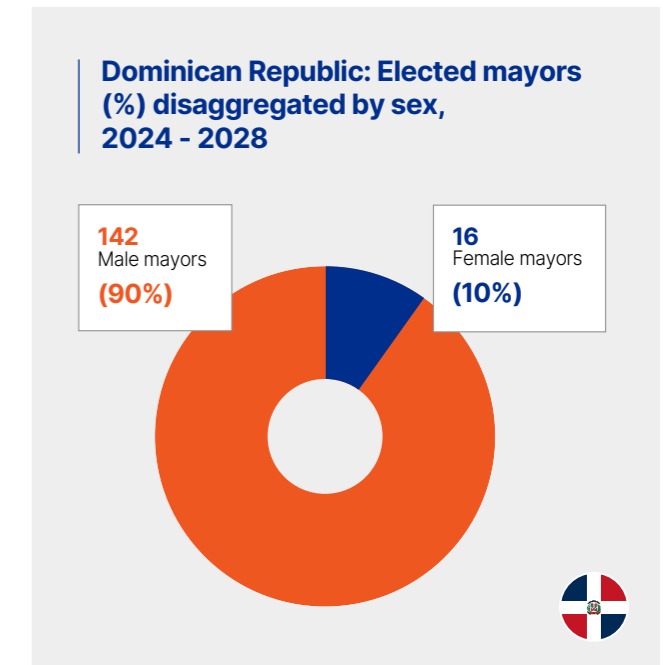
Costa Rica’s experience therefore illustrates both the potential and the constraints of comprehensive parity legislation. The country has achieved **meaningful progress, yet substantive equality remains elusive.** Women still hold only one-quarter of local executive positions, remain largely absent from the country’s most visible political centers, and tend to access these roles later in life. Closing these gaps will require **measures that complement candidacy parity, including stronger compliance and transparency in party support and resource allocation, targeted support such as childcare assistance and campaign financing reforms, mechanisms to promote youth representation, and mentoring programs for emerging women leaders.** Without such measures, Costa Rica’s strong legal commitments risk falling short of sustained and inclusive progress in women’s local political representation.



37. La Nación (2024), Mujeres obtienen mayor cantidad de alcaldías de la historia.

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC: Regression Amid Partial Parity Measures

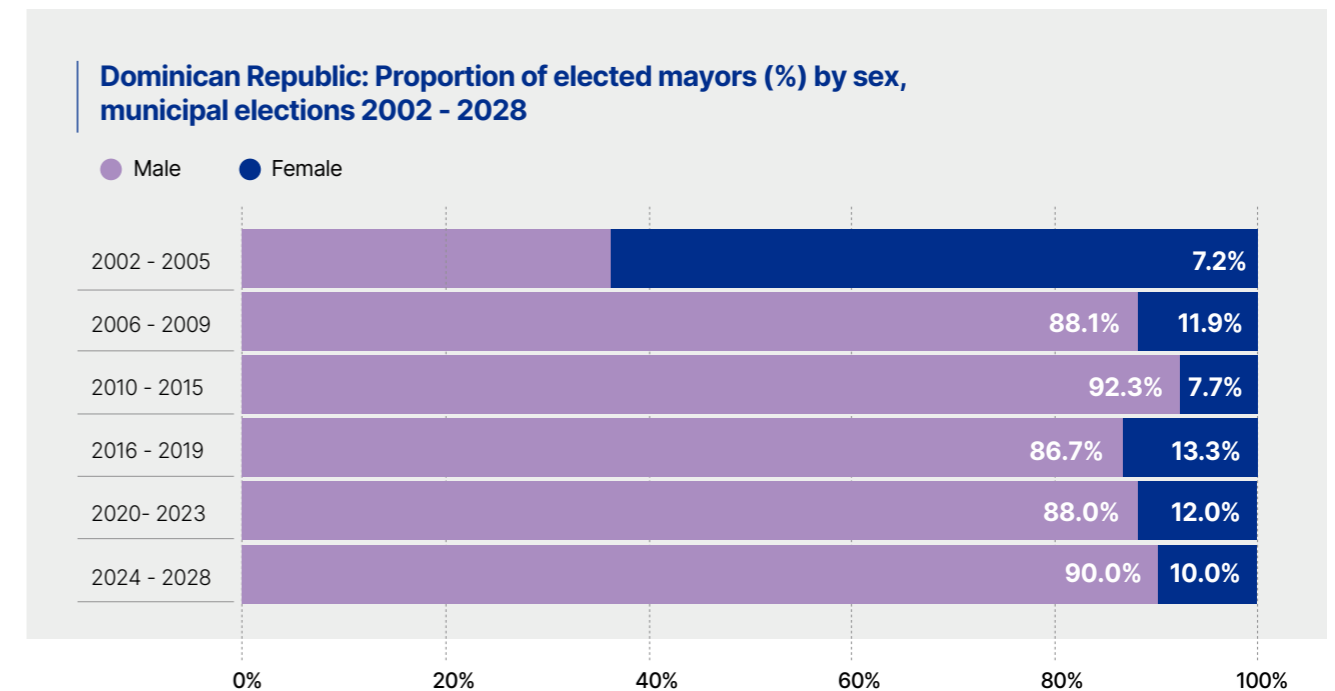
In **2024 the Dominican Republic** renewed its local authorities through municipal elections held on 18 February in 158 municipalities and 235 municipal districts. Since provincial governors are appointed by the executive, these municipal elections form the highest tier of locally elected executive power in the country and therefore provide the clearest window into women’s pathways to subnational leadership. The results offered little cause for optimism. **Women were elected to only 16 mayoralties, representing 10 percent of the total³⁸. This marks a regression from the 12 percent recorded in the 2020 elections³⁹.** While numerically modest, the **decline remains significant as women’s representation in local executive office remains below the regional average and among the lowest levels in the region.**



Source: Developed by GWL Voices based on official electoral data

Viewed across two decades, the picture becomes even more discouraging. **Since 2002, the proportion of female mayors has increased by only 2.6 percentage points⁴⁰, one of the slowest rates of change observed in Latin**

America. At this pace, women’s access to municipal leadership appears nearly static, reflecting entrenched structural and institutional barriers that have proven resistant to the limited reforms adopted to date.



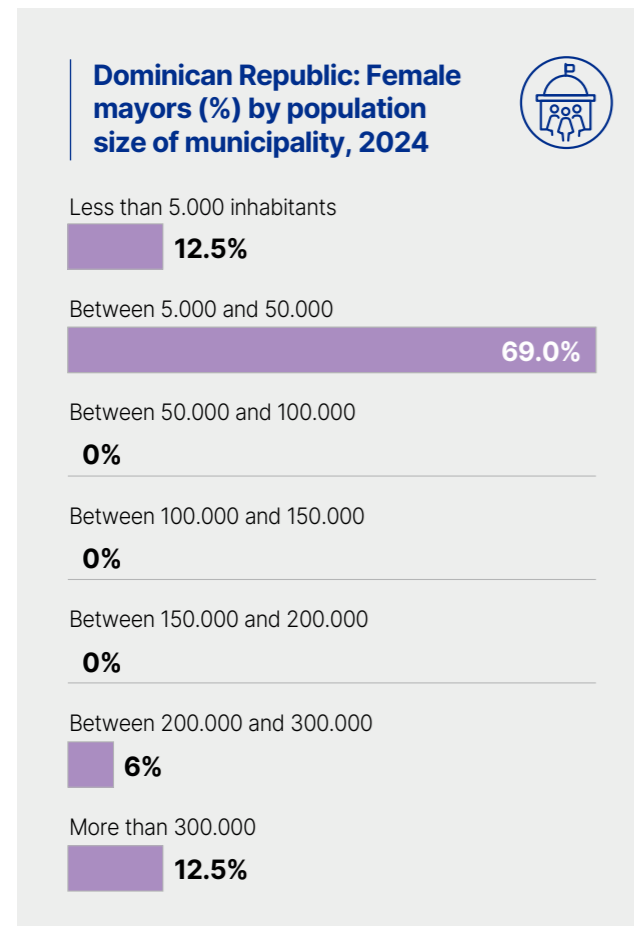
Source: Developed by GWL Voices based on data from ECLAC (2025), Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean (GEO).

38. Junta Central Electoral (2024), Resultados Municipales 2024.

39. Junta Central Electoral (2020), Elecciones Municipales 2020.

40. GWL Voices calculations based on data from ECLAC (2025), Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean (GEO).

In terms of geographic distribution, women's municipal leadership follows a pattern consistent with regional trends. Nearly seven in ten women elected as mayors govern localities with fewer than 50,000 inhabitants, while representation declines markedly as population size increases. **Very few women lead mid-sized or large municipalities, and their presence in the country's major urban centers remains minimal.**



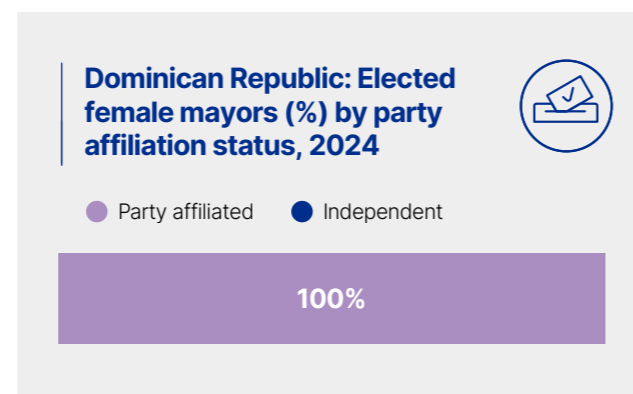
Source: Developed by GWL Voices based on official electoral data.

Despite the overall low levels of representation, a few notable exceptions emerged in 2024. Women were elected as mayors in several of the country's most populous municipalities, including the National District, where the incumbent female mayor was re-elected, as well as Santo Domingo Norte and Tamboril, where women were newly elected to office. These outcomes indicate that, while women's overall representation remains low, individual women are beginning to gain visibility in politically significant urban centers. Whether these cases represent the beginning of broader change or remain isolated

41. Age data was compiled through a review of campaign materials, media coverage, municipal official websites, interviews, and other publicly accessible biographical information.

examples will depend on whether the legal and institutional environment evolves to support women's candidacies more systematically.

A closer look at party affiliation among elected female mayors shows a highly uneven distribution. Although **all women elected to mayoral office were affiliated with political parties**, 94 percent were associated with center-left parties and only 6 percent to center-right parties. This imbalance indicates that **women's electoral success is concentrated within a narrow segment of the political spectrum**. Although the reasons for this pattern require further study, the **data suggest that women's opportunities to access local executive positions vary significantly across political parties, reflecting differences in internal practices and levels of commitment to promoting women's political participation.**



Source: Developed by GWL Voices based on official electoral data.

Information on the age of elected female mayors remains notably limited. Confirmed data is available for only 13 of the 16 women elected in 2024⁴¹, a gap that reflects **broader challenges in obtaining comprehensive, gender-disaggregated information on local executive leadership in the Dominican Republic**. Among those for whom data is available, the vast majority, around 85 percent, were aged 46 or older, with an average age of 54. Only a small number were between 41 and 45 years old, and none were under 40. This pattern is consistent with trends observed in other countries analyzed in this study, where **women tend to reach executive office later in life, pointing to persistent generational and gendered barriers that continue to limit younger women's access to local political leadership.**



Note: Age data were available for 13 of the 16 women elected as mayors in 2024. Percentages are calculated based on available data.
Source: Developed by GWL Voices based on publicly available biographical

At the policy level, the Dominican Republic has adopted **measures to promote women's participation in political life, yet these remain partial and insufficient** to ensure substantive equality. The Electoral Regime Law (Law 20-23) establishes a minimum 40 percent and maximum 60 percent gender quota, but this applies only to plurinominal positions. **Uninomial contests such as mayoralties remain outside the scope of parity regulations, directly contributing to the continued exclusion of women from the country's principal municipal executive posts.**

The only gender-related provision that does apply to mayoral races is alternation within the mayor and deputy mayor (síndico and vicesíndico) formula. **While parity in paired candidacies** can contribute to expanding women's access to elected office, its **impact on executive leadership remains uneven with recent election results suggesting that parties frequently position women as secondary rather than principal candidates**. Although vice-mayoral positions are not the focus of this analysis, the contrast between the two tiers is revealing. In 2024, **women won nearly 90 percent of vice-mayoral seats but only 10 percent of mayoral positions. This stark imbalance illustrates how parity provisions, when applied only to shared electoral formulas without addressing the hierarchy between positions, can inadvertently entrench rather than correct gendered**

42. Observatorio de Participación Política de las Mujeres (2025), Cantidad de Candidaturas Propuestas y Electas – Alcaldía.

patterns of access to power. The consequences of these legal gaps are visible in candidate pools. The 2024 municipal elections saw only a modest increase in women running for mayor, from 14.3 percent in 2020 to 16.6 percent in 2024⁴². Without legal obligations to ensure women's presence among mayoral candidates, parties have little incentive to challenge established nomination practices, and women remain a small minority of those competing for local executive office.

Beyond electoral legislation, the Dominican Republic addresses **gender-based political violence** primarily through provisions contained in Law 20-23, which defines such violence as an electoral offence punishable by imprisonment. While this framework establishes sanctions within the electoral context, its **scope is largely focused on conduct occurring during electoral processes and does not explicitly regulate prevention, protection, or reparative mechanisms beyond this period**. This regulatory approach may leave certain dimensions of political participation, particularly those occurring outside electoral cycles, less directly addressed.

Similarly, **no specific measures have been developed to address care-related barriers that constrain women's participation in politics**, despite evidence that the unequal distribution of unpaid care work remains a significant obstacle to women's political engagement. The absence of youth-focused quota mechanisms applicable to local executive offices, including mayoral races, further compounds the age disparities observed among elected female mayors, reflecting broader gaps in inclusion and political renewal.

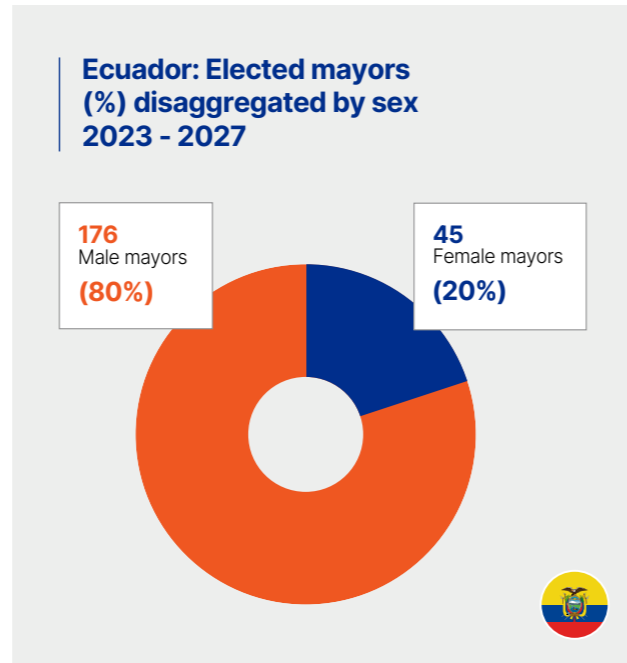
The **Dominican Republic's experience shows how partial parity provisions can coexist with persistent exclusion from executive office**. With mayoral races largely outside parity requirements, and alternation rules operating within a hierarchical ticket structure, women remain more likely to be placed in secondary positions than to lead. Reversing recent regression will require extending parity measures to mayoral contests, strengthening implementation and oversight, and adopting complementary measures that address the barriers that continue to limit women's access to municipal executive leadership.



ECUADOR: Emerging Progress in Women's Local and Subnational Leadership

On 5 February 2023, Ecuador held sectional elections to renew local authorities across all levels of subnational government, including 221 mayors and 23 provincial prefects. These contests allow an assessment of women's participation in both municipal and provincial executive leadership, the two most influential tiers of locally elected government in the country.

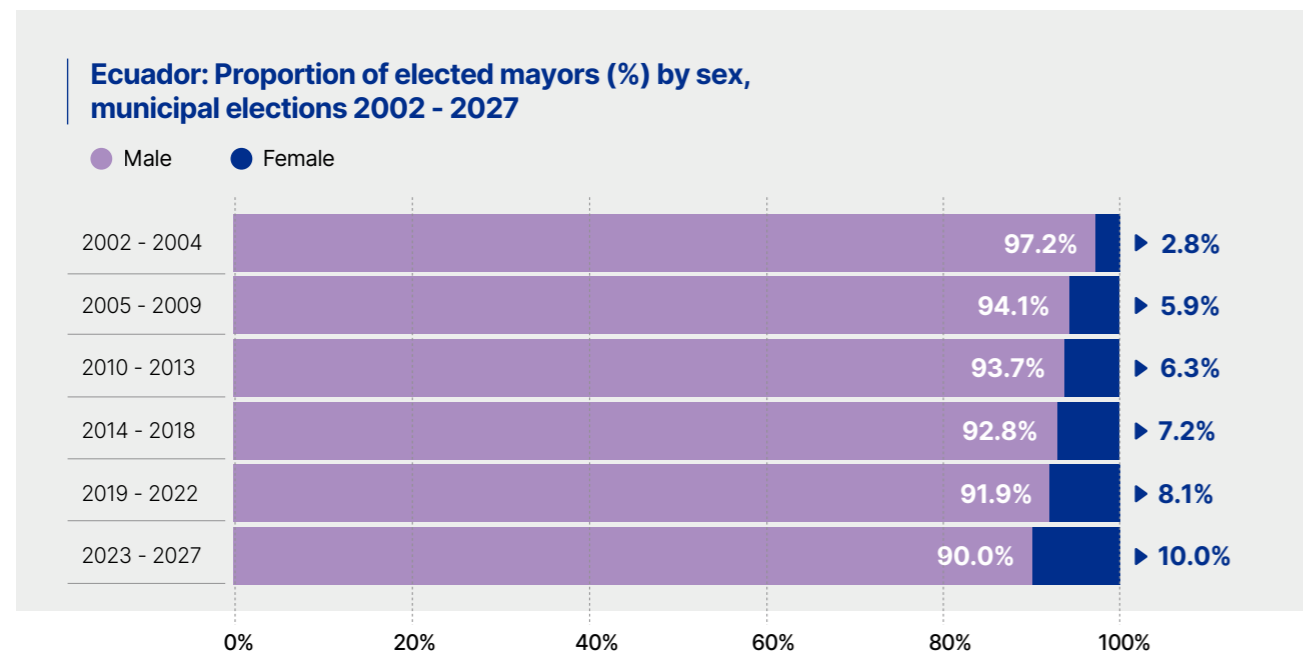
In these elections, women gained a stronger foothold in local executive leadership in 2023, securing 45 of Ecuador's 221 mayoralties, representing 20 percent of the total⁴³. This marks the highest level of women's representation in municipal office to date and a substantial increase from 8.1 percent in the previous electoral cycle⁴⁴. The magnitude of this shift places Ecuador among the countries that have recorded the most significant recent advances in women's mayoral representation in Latin America.



Source: Developed by GWL Voices based on official electoral data

Over the past two decades, women's representation in mayoral office has gradually expanded, rising by almost 18 percentage points⁴⁵. Yet women still occupy only one

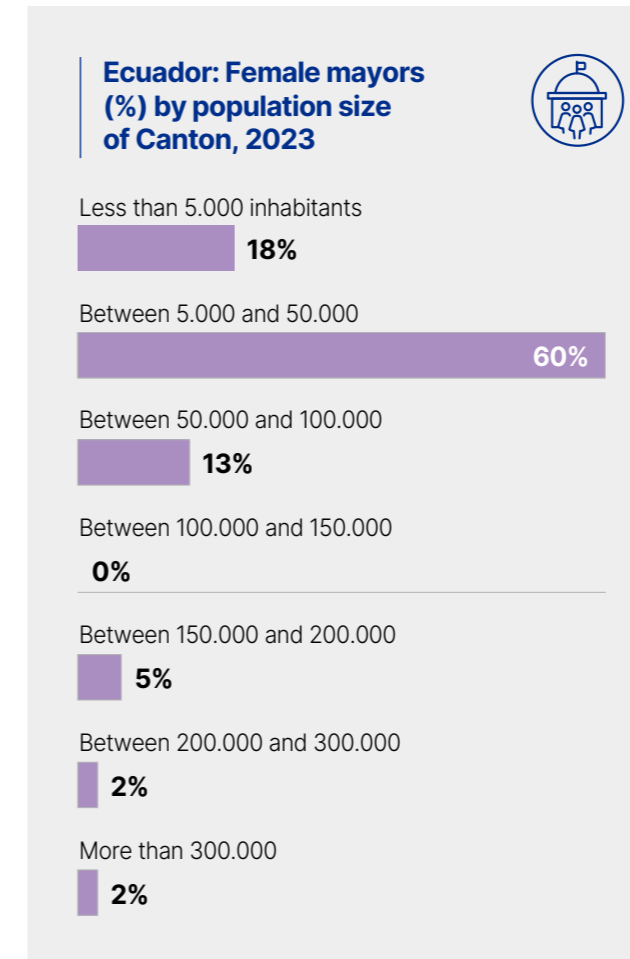
in five mayoral posts nationwide, indicating that while progress has been meaningful, parity thus far continues to remain distant.



Source: Developed by GWL Voices based on data from ECLAC (2025), Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean (GEO).

43. Consejo Nacional Electoral (2023), Presentación de Resultados Finales Elecciones Seccionales 2023: Alcaldes/as.
 44. Consejo Nacional Electoral (2019), Presentación de Resultados Finales Elecciones Seccionales 2019: Alcaldes/as.
 45. GWL Voices calculations based on data from ECLAC (2025), Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean (GEO)

The geographic distribution of women's municipal leadership follows familiar regional patterns. Nearly four-fifths of elected female mayors govern cantons with fewer than 50,000 inhabitants, while their presence diminishes sharply in more populous territories.



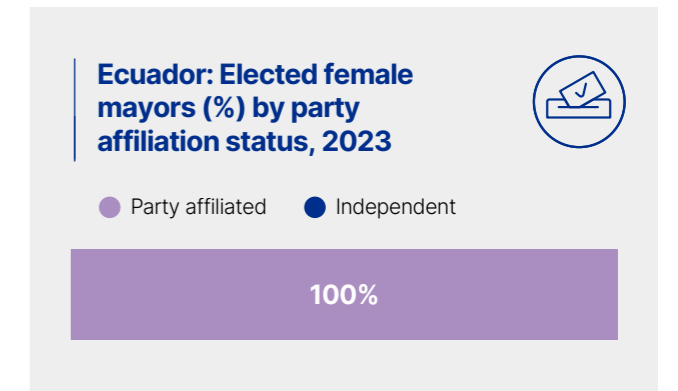
Source: Developed by GWL Voices based on official electoral data.

However, while women assumed mayoral office in 20 of Ecuador's 24 provinces, with the largest concentrations in Manabí (six), Guayas (five), and Los Ríos (five), they remained largely absent from Ecuador's most prominent urban centers. Neither Quito nor Guayaquil, the country's two largest cities and principal political hubs, elected a woman mayor. Among the twelve most populous cities, only Ambato broke this pattern, electing its first female and Indigenous mayor. This outcome carries particular significance in a country where Indigenous women face compounded barriers to political participation. Yet the broader pattern underscores that women's access to

46. Age data was compiled through a review of campaign materials, media coverage, municipal official websites, interviews, and other publicly accessible biographical information.

mayoral leadership continues to be concentrated in smaller jurisdictions, where political visibility, resource control, and media attention are more limited.

Partisan alignment among Ecuador's elected female mayors reflects the country's fragmented political landscape. All women elected to mayoral office ran through party-affiliated or alliance-based candidacies, with just over half (51 percent) affiliated with center-left parties or movements, 31 percent with center-right groups, 13 percent with centrist formations, and 5 percent with mixed or local alliances.

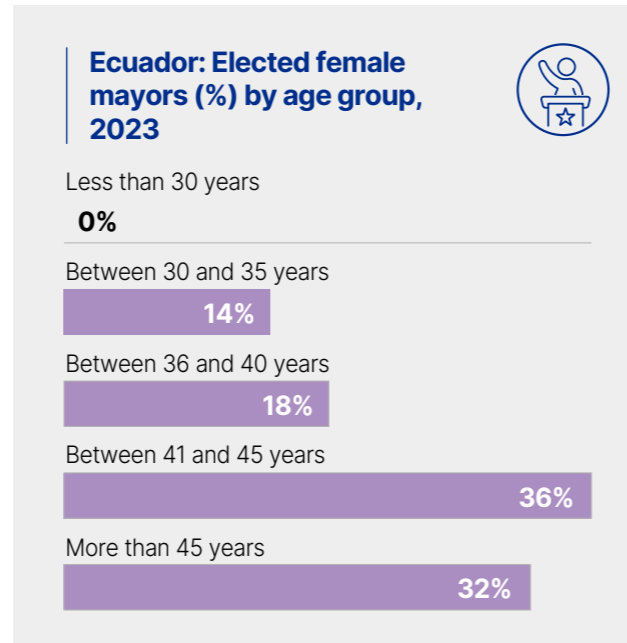


Source: Developed by GWL Voices based on official electoral data.

This distribution is broadly consistent with Ecuador's highly fragmented political system, where local alliances and movement-based candidacies play a significant role in subnational elections. The slightly stronger representation among center-left formations aligns with regional trends, though women remain underrepresented across the ideological spectrum.

Similar to the situation observed in the Dominican Republic, information on the age of elected female mayors in Ecuador remains notably limited and fragmented. Official electoral data do not include systematic age disaggregation, and relevant details are not publicly available through national or local government institutions. As a result, it was only possible to confirm the ages of 28 out of the 45 women elected in 2023⁴⁶, reflecting a persistent lack of transparency and gender-sensitive data at the subnational level.

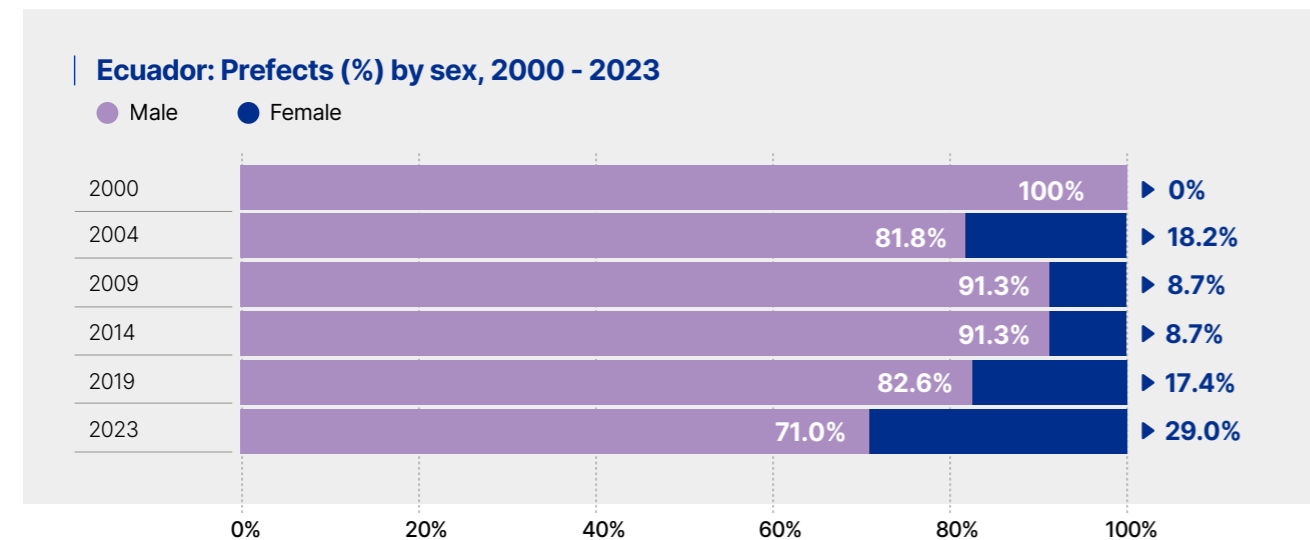
Among the cases for which age information could be verified, most elected women were between 31 and 45 years old, with an average age of 44. No women under 30 were elected, and those aged 46 or older accounted for nearly one-third of the group. Although the dataset is limited, these **figures suggest that women who attain mayoral office in Ecuador tend to do so during mid-career stages, with very low participation from younger candidates and comparatively fewer from older age groups.** Given the partial nature of the data, further research is needed to determine whether this pattern reflects broader national trends or is influenced by the current limitations in gender-disaggregated information at the subnational level.



Note: Age data were available for 28 of the 45 women elected as mayors in 2023. Percentages are calculated based on available data.
Source: Developed by GWL Voices based on official electoral data.

Beyond the municipal level, the 2023 **prefectural elections marked a modest but notable advance in women's access to provincial executive office. Of the country's 24 prefectures, seven were won by women, representing 29 percent of the total**⁴⁷. This reflects an increase from the 2019 elections, when only four women were elected among 23 prefects⁴⁸, and a significant shift from 2002, when no women held these positions. While this upward trend signals gradual progress, women continue to occupy fewer than one in three provincial executive posts,

with the current level of representation remaining well below parity, highlighting the persistence of structural and institutional barriers that hinder women's full and effective access to decision-making roles at the subnational level. The geographic distribution of women's provincial leadership follows patterns similar to those observed at the municipal level. Over half of the female prefects govern provinces with fewer than 500,000 inhabitants, while only two lead provinces with populations exceeding two million

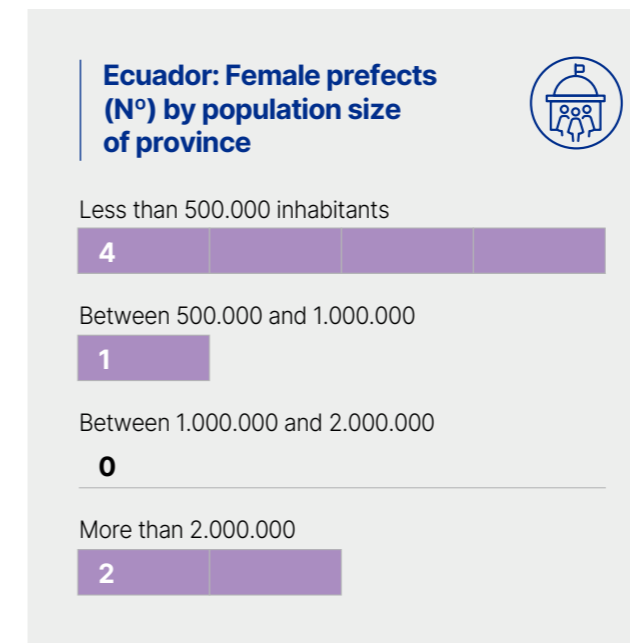


Source: Developed by GWL Voices based on data from Serrano, S. B. (2021), Las prefectas provinciales en Ecuador 1979-2019. América Latina Hoy, Universidad de Salamanca.

47. Consejo Nacional Electoral (2023), Presentación de Resultados Finales Elecciones Seccionales 2023: Prefectos/as.
48. Consejo Nacional Electoral (2019), Presentación de Resultados Finales Elecciones Seccionales 2019: Prefectos/as.

No women were elected in mid-sized provinces with populations between one and two million. This **concentration in smaller and larger territories, with a gap in the middle tier, suggests that women's access to provincial leadership depends on specific local political dynamics rather than a consistent pattern across all demographic contexts.**

Nevertheless, the election of women to head two of Ecuador's most significant provinces marks an important milestone. In Guayas, one of the country's most populous and economically influential provinces, and in Pichincha, home to the capital city of Quito, a female prefect was re-elected. These outcomes suggest that, **although women's leadership remains predominantly concentrated in smaller territories, it is beginning to extend to provinces of greater political and demographic weight.**

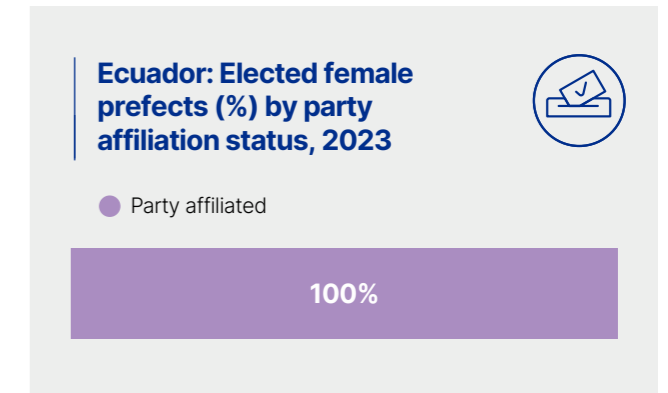


Note: Distribution by population size of region among the seven women elected as governors in 2023.
Source: Developed by GWL Voices based on official electoral data.

All women elected as prefects in 2023 ran through party-affiliated candidacies, with no independent candidates elected. Among them, the majority were affiliated with center-left political forces, which accounted for six of the seven female prefects, while only one represented a center-right party. This distribution is broadly consistent with regional trends in which center-

49. Age data was compiled through a review of campaign materials, media coverage, municipal official websites, interviews, and other publicly accessible biographical information and confirmed by the Consorcio de Gobiernos Autonomos Provinciales del Ecuador (CONGOPE).

left movements have tended to offer more space for women's participation and leadership at the subnational level. However, given the small number of women elected overall, these results should be interpreted with caution, as they may reflect local political contexts and individual candidacies rather than consistent partisan dynamics.



Source: Developed by GWL Voices based on official electoral data.

The **average age of elected female prefects in Ecuador in 2023 was 48 years, indicating a predominance of mid to late-career women in provincial executive office**⁴⁹.

Nearly three-quarters of those elected were aged 46 or older, with only a small share in their early forties. This age profile suggests that access to higher levels of subnational leadership remains concentrated among more experienced women, while younger generations continue to face significant barriers to entry. Similar patterns observed across other countries reinforce the finding that women's pathways to executive office, particularly at higher levels of government, tend to open later in their political careers.



Ecuador: Elected female prefects (Nº) by age group, 2023



Less than 30 years

0

Between 30 and 35 years

0

Between 36 and 40 years

0

Between 41 and 45 years

2

More than 45 years

4

Note: Age distribution based on the seven women elected as prefects in 2023.
Source: Developed by GWL Voices based on official electoral data.

Ecuador's recent gains in women's political representation are underpinned by a trajectory of progressive legal reforms. **Since the late 1990s, the country has moved from basic quota provisions toward a broader parity framework.** The 2008 Constitution reaffirmed equality between men and women in candidate selection, and the 2009 Democracy Code translated this principle into practice by applying parity to multi-member electoral lists and introducing partial requirements for prefectural tickets. Reforms adopted in 2020 further strengthened gender alternation rules, expanding parity obligations in legislative and local council elections, although single-member positions such as mayors and prefects continued to fall outside mandatory parity measures.

A major shift came with the **2025 reform of the Democracy Code**, which mandates full gender parity (50 percent women and 50 percent men) across all candidacies, including executive tickets. This reform **closes the long-standing gap for single-member offices and establishes one of the most comprehensive parity frameworks in Latin America.** It also signals Ecuador's continued commitment to aligning legal standards with its broader efforts to expand women's political participation.

The results analyzed in this report, however, predate this reform, and the 2023 sectional elections continued to reflect the constraints of the earlier legal framework, with women comprising only 24 percent of prefectural candidates and 31 percent of mayoral candidates, and with particularly low participation among younger women⁵⁰. Whether the 2025 reform will translate into measurable gains in the next electoral cycle will depend not only on its implementation but also on the strength of enforcement mechanisms and the extent to which political parties adhere to parity requirements rather than seeking ways to circumvent them.

Ecuador also addresses gender-based political violence within its Comprehensive Organic Law to Prevent and Eradicate Violence against Women, recognizing it as a barrier to women's full political participation.

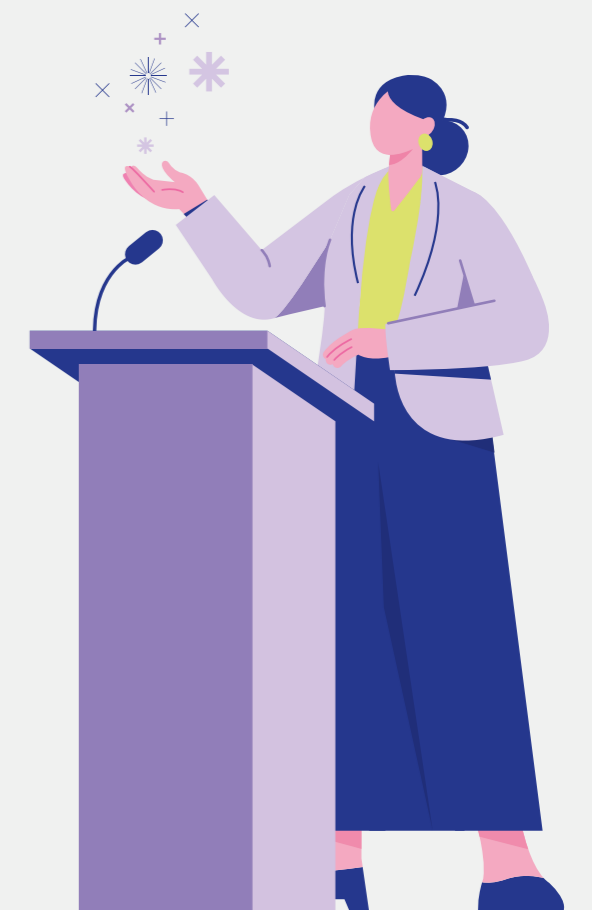
Nevertheless, the assassination of the country's youngest female mayor in 2023, which occurred in a context marked by rising levels of organized crime and insecurity, illustrates the complex security environment in which women in public life operate. Ecuador has taken important steps since then to strengthen responses through judicial rulings and the development of institutional mechanisms aimed at addressing gender-based political violence. **However, challenges remain in ensuring their consistent implementation and effectiveness in protecting women in political leadership.**

Another persistent barrier relates to care-related responsibilities that constrain women's participation in politics, for which no specific measures were identified.

Similarly, although Ecuador has established a 25 percent youth quota under the Ley Orgánica de Juventudes, approved on 25 October 2022 as an amendment to the Código de la Democracia, this measure applies exclusively to binominal and multi-member electoral positions and does not extend to mayoral or prefectural races. This occurs within a broader constitutional and legal framework that guarantees equality, non-discrimination, and political participation rights for young people and other historically excluded groups. However, these **commitments have not yet been translated into targeted measures to support youth representation in single-member executive contests.** In the absence of affirmative action measures, younger women facing intersecting gender and age-related barriers remain largely excluded from local and subnational executive office.

Ecuador's experience illustrates both the promise of progressive legal reform and the challenges of translating formal commitments into substantive equality. The country has achieved some of the most significant gains in women's local executive representation in the region, supported by incremental advances in its legal framework and shifting political dynamics.

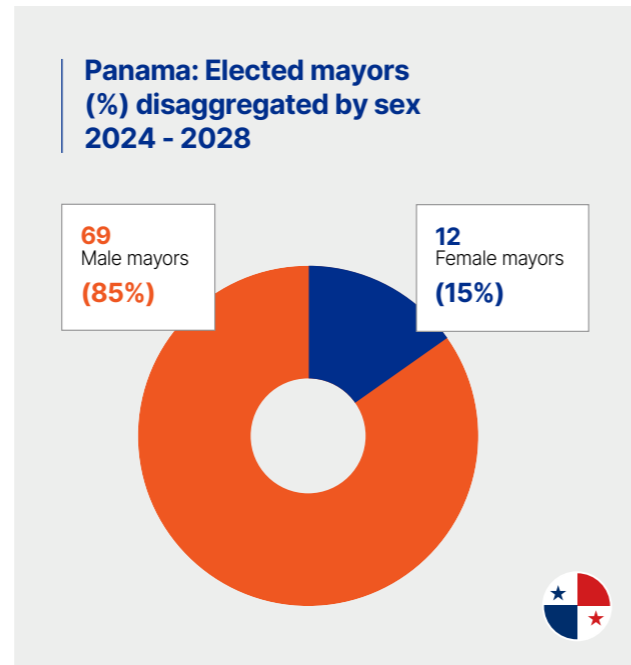
Yet women remain far from parity, are concentrated in smaller jurisdictions, are largely absent from major urban centers, and tend to access executive office predominantly during mid-career stages. The 2025 parity reform offers a critical opportunity to accelerate progress, but its impact will depend on rigorous enforcement, complementary measures to address structural barriers, and sustained political commitment to ensuring that legal parity translates into parity in practice.



50. Ecuador Chequea (2023), De 244 gobiernos seccionales, apenas 48 estarán dirigidos por mujeres.

PANAMA: Stagnation Despite Progressive Legal Reforms

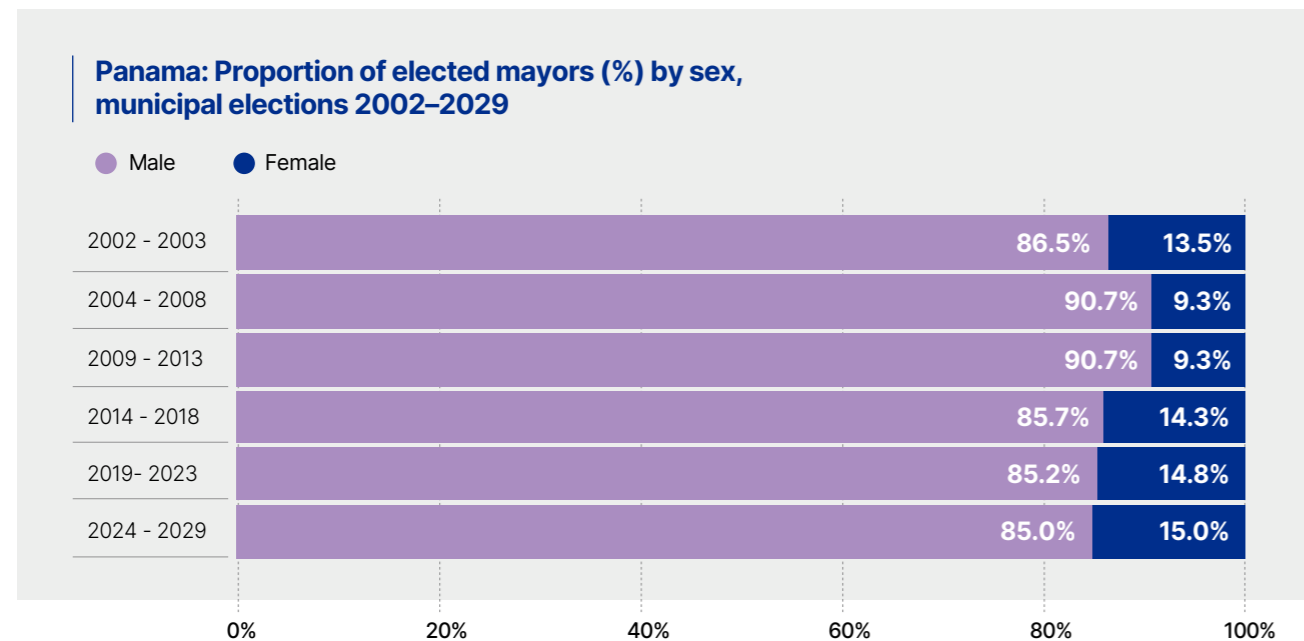
On 5 May 2024, Panama held general elections that included the renewal of mayors across the country's 81 districts. In Panama's governance structure, provincial governors are appointed by the Executive Branch rather than elected⁵¹, making municipal government the main basis for examining women's participation in locally elected executive leadership. The results offered little evidence of progress. **Women were elected to only 12 of Panama's 81 mayoralties⁵², representing just 15 percent of the total.** This marks **virtually no change from the previous elections in 2019, when women held 14.8 percent of mayoral positions⁵³, underscoring persistent stagnation in women's access to local executive office.**



Source: Developed by GWL Voices based on official electoral data

An analysis of historical trends reveals an even more concerning picture. **Since 2002, women's representation among mayors has increased by only 1.5 percentage points⁵⁴, the lowest rate of progress observed across all six countries analyzed in this report. Over more**

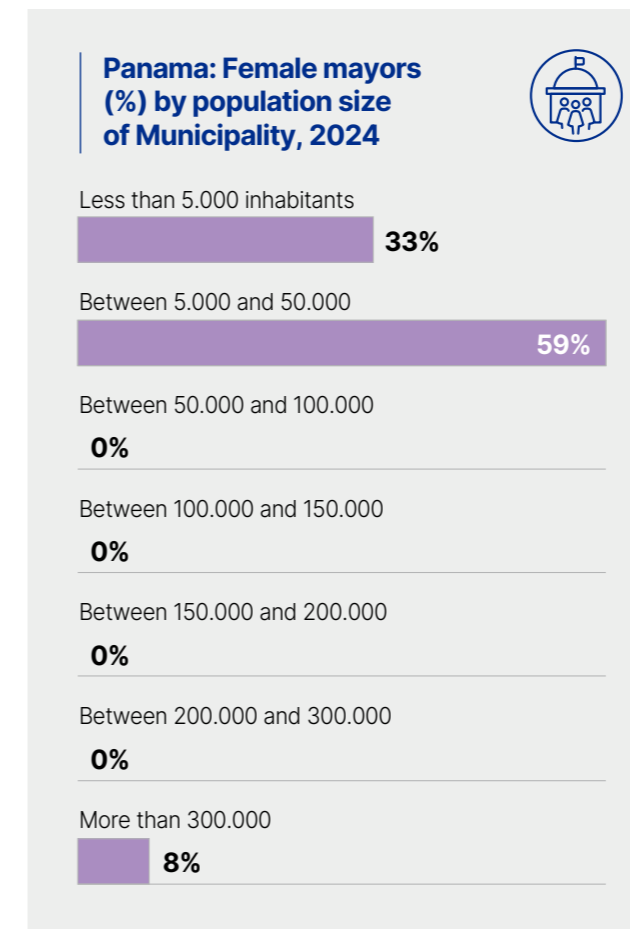
than two decades, women's share of mayoral positions has remained nearly unchanged, pointing to enduring structural and institutional barriers that have proven resistant to the legal reforms adopted during this period.



Source: Developed by GWL Voices based on data from ECLAC (2025), Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean (GEO).

51. In July 2024, at the beginning of President's José Raúl Mulino's second administration, five of the country's 13 appointed governors were women.
 52. Tribunal Electoral (2024), Votos Obtenidos por Alcaldes Proclamados, Según Distrito 2024.
 53. Tribunal Electoral (2019), Votos Obtenidos por Alcaldes Proclamados, Según Distrito 2019.
 54. GWL Voices calculations based on data from ECLAC (2025), Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean (GEO).

The distribution of women's municipal leadership in Panama reveals a clear size-based imbalance. Most women who won mayoral office in 2024 did so in smaller districts, where populations are under 50,000 and political competition tends to be less intensive. No women were elected in districts with populations between 50,000 and 300,000, and representation drops to zero in the country's more populous municipalities. This pattern points to a highly uneven landscape in which women's access to executive authority remains concentrated in lower-visibility localities.

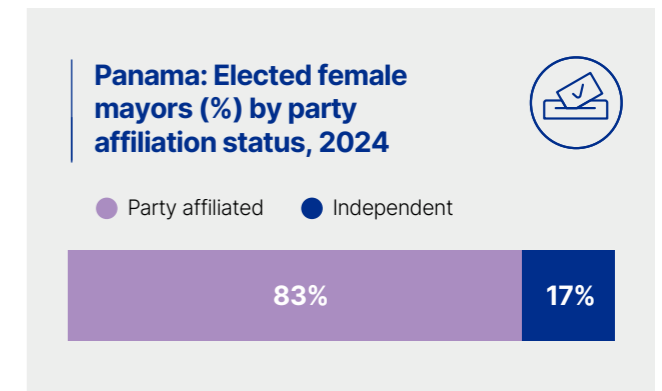


Source: Developed by GWL Voices based on official electoral data.

However, one notable exception emerged in 2024. A woman was elected mayor of San Miguelito, the country's second-most populous district, marking an important breakthrough for women's access to leadership in major urban centers. Beyond this case, **women remain largely absent from Panama's principal municipalities, highlighting the continued barriers they face to reaching positions of influence within the country's most politically and demographically significant districts.**

55. Tribunal Electoral (2024), Voto Informado: Hojas de vida de candidatas/as para alcalde.

The political affiliation of women elected as mayors in 2024 reveals a distribution that diverges from broader regional patterns. Half of the elected female mayors were aligned with center-right parties, one-third with center-left parties, and less than one-fifth ran as independents. This configuration highlights the predominance of traditional party structures, particularly those on the center-right of the political spectrum, in facilitating women's access to local executive office.

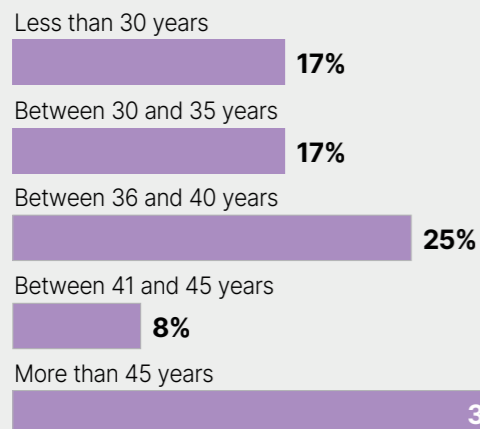


Source: Developed by GWL Voices based on official electoral data.

Panama thus contrasts with trends observed in the other countries analyzed in this study, where women's local leadership more frequently emerges from center-left or progressive platforms. **The finding suggests that women's political participation in Panama remains largely shaped by established party hierarchies, rather than by political projects or ideological agendas centered on advancing gender equality or broader social transformation.** The limited presence of independent female candidates further underscores the centrality of party gatekeeping in determining women's pathways to municipal leadership.

On the other hand, the age profile of elected female mayors in Panama offers a more encouraging picture. **The average age of elected female mayors in 2024 was 41 years, indicating a relatively balanced age distribution compared with other countries in the region⁵⁵.** Nearly 60 percent of those elected were under the age of 40, reflecting a stronger presence of younger women in local executive office than is typically observed elsewhere in Latin America.

Panama: Elected female mayors (%) by age group, 2024



Source: Developed by GWL Voices based on official electoral data.

A striking example is the election of the mayor of San Miguelito, who assumed office at just 27 years of age. She is one of the youngest mayors in Panama's history, illustrating the potential for generational renewal in local political leadership. While women over 45 still accounted for about one-third of those elected, the **comparatively youthful profile of Panama's female mayors suggests a positive, albeit gradual, shift toward greater inclusion of younger women in municipal governance.** This pattern contrasts with trends observed in the other countries analyzed in this study, where women's access to executive office tends to occur much later in their political careers.

The stagnation in women's representation persists despite important legislative steps to promote gender equality in electoral processes. Amendments to the Electoral Code introduced since 1997 have progressively expanded parity provisions, with the most recent reform, Law 356 of 2023, mandating gender parity in party conventions and candidate selection processes. The law requires political parties to nominate equal numbers of women and men for positions including mayors, deputies, representatives, councilors, and internal party authorities.

However, **parity provisions include escape clauses that effectively undermine compliance.** Parties may replace women candidates with men when they claim no women are available, subject to certification by the party's

Women's Secretariat⁵⁶. These provisions have weakened enforcement and limited women's access to competitive positions. In the 2024 elections, women represented only 19 percent of all candidates⁵⁷ and secured just 12 percent of elected positions across all levels of government, far below parity targets. This gap between legal requirements and electoral outcomes underscores the extent to which weak enforcement mechanisms undermine the effectiveness of parity legislation.

Beyond electoral quotas, Panama has also adopted Law 184 on Political Violence (November 2020), which seeks to prevent, sanction, and eradicate gender-based political violence. The **law recognizes multiple forms of violence, including physical, psychological, economic, and symbolic, as barriers to women's full political participation.** While the law establishes an important regulatory framework, available evidence suggests that **implementation challenges remain, particularly regarding enforcement, sanctions, and scope.**

In terms of care-related barriers, no specific measures have been introduced to support women in political life.

Persistent inequalities in the distribution of unpaid care work continue to constrain women's ability to participate in politics on equal terms, reinforcing broader structural barriers to representation. Similarly, **Panama lacks youth quota mechanisms for single-office positions such as mayoralties,** though the relatively younger age profile of elected female mayors suggests that generational barriers may be somewhat less pronounced than in other countries analyzed in this study.

Panama's experience illustrates how parity provisions can fall short when compliance mechanisms allow exceptions that dilute their effect. Closing the gap between legal commitments and electoral outcomes will require tightening oversight, eliminating loopholes, and ensuring that sanctions for non-compliance are applied effectively. Addressing persistent constraints, including care responsibilities, political violence, and unequal access to campaign resources, will also be critical to shifting long-standing patterns of underrepresentation in local executive office.

Facing the Barriers: Women's Realities in Local and Subnational Politics

The quantitative data presented above provides essential evidence on the state of women's representation in local executive office, but **understanding women's political leadership also requires capturing the experiences, perceptions, and trajectories that shape women's access to and exercise of political power.**

For this reason, GWL Voices, in collaboration with UCLG and UN Women, incorporated a survey among women holding locally or regionally elected executive positions across the six countries studied as a central component of the research design. The **survey was developed to document first-hand perspectives on the obstacles women continue to face in accessing and sustaining leadership roles, as well as the factors that have enabled their political trajectories.**

The insights that follow, drawn from the voices of 101 women mayors and governors, deepen the analysis by illuminating the lived realities that shape women's pathways to local executive power in Latin America.

Overview of the Survey and Respondent Profile

The survey instrument was deliberately designed to capture the full spectrum of women's political trajectories and the structural conditions shaping their leadership at the local level. **Administered anonymously,** it combined primarily **multiple-choice questions** to systematically document women's perspectives and lived experiences across core dimensions of political participation. These included **pathways to leadership, motivations for entering politics, enabling and constraining factors, media coverage, unpaid care responsibilities, gender-based political violence, and views on gender equality issues.**

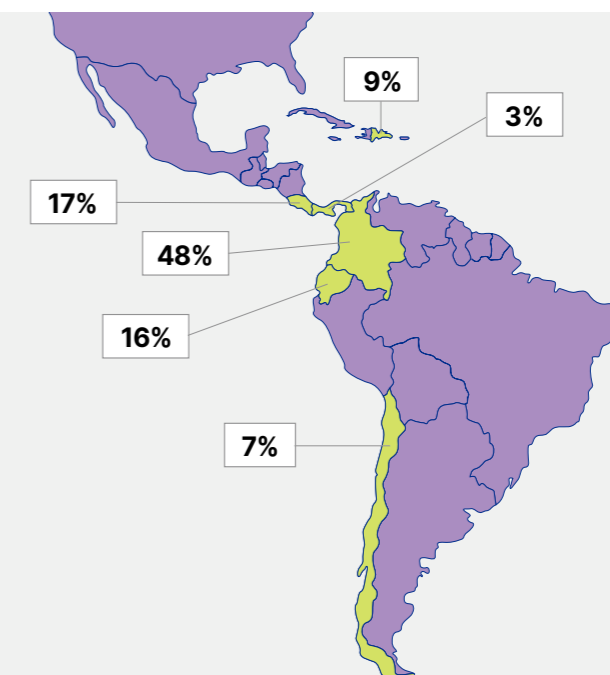
The survey was **disseminated to 311 local women authorities through municipal and subnational government associations, which were reached with the support of UCLG. Follow-up engagement to encourage survey completion was carried out both through UCLG's follow-up via association networks and by UN Women country offices,** which provided additional support through direct outreach to locally elected women leaders. The **survey achieved a 32 percent response rate, which includes both complete and partially completed questionnaires. Among respondents, 63 percent completed the full questionnaire.**



62%

Completed the survey

63 of 101 participants

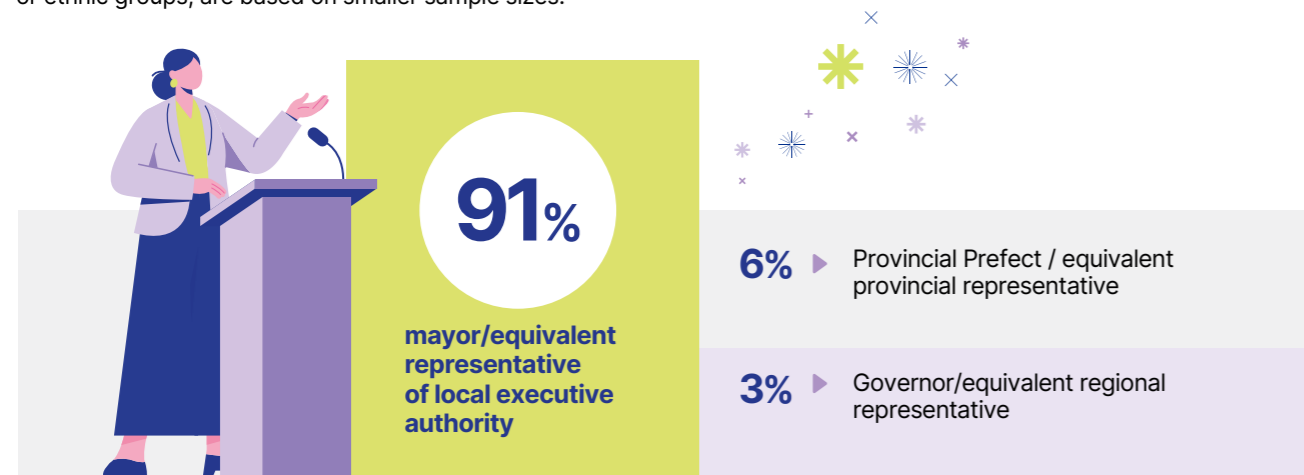


Source: Developed by GWL Voices based on survey findings

56. Idea International (2025), De La Paridad Legal a La Paridad Real: Estrategias para la Igualdad sustantiva en Panamá.

57. European Union (2024), Informe Final Misión de Expertos Electorales, Panamá 2024.

As mentioned in the methodological insight section, in order to ensure that the maximum amount of information shared by participants was used, **all available responses were included in the analysis of each question.** As a result, the **number of respondents varies across questions and findings, ranging from 101 to approximately 64 participants.** In addition, analyses of certain subgroups, including women who do not intend to continue in politics after their current mandate, those reporting experiences of political violence, and those belonging to particular age or ethnic groups, are based on smaller sample sizes.

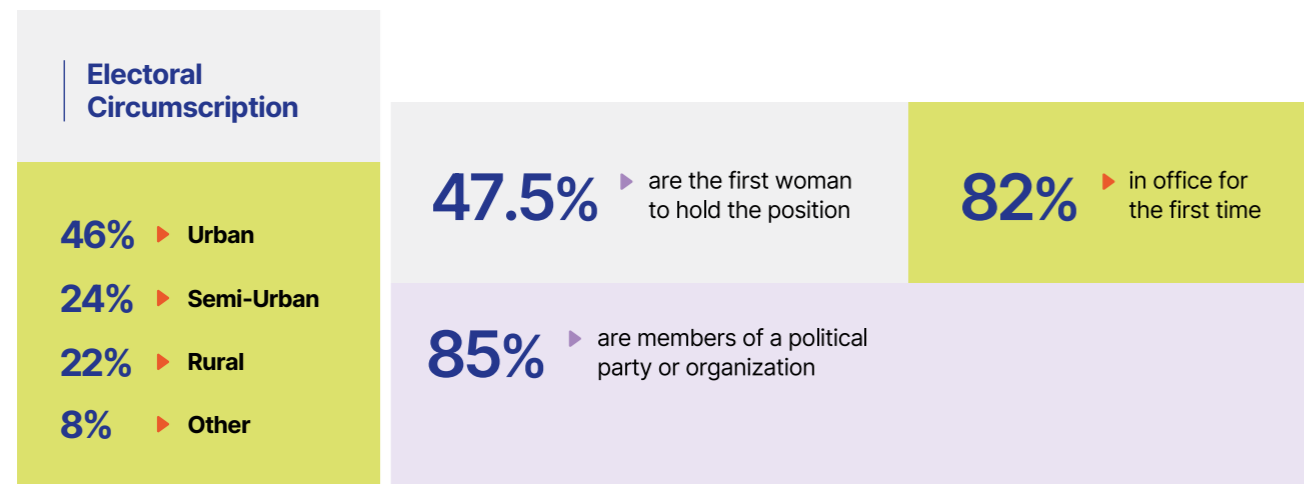


Source: Developed by GWL Voices based on survey findings

The **vast majority of respondents (nine in ten) held mayoral positions**, with a small proportion serving as prefects or governors. **Respondents governed across a broad range of territories:** nearly half represented urban districts (46 percent), while smaller shares came from semi-urban areas⁵⁸ (24 percent) and rural jurisdictions (22 percent). They were almost **evenly divided on whether**

The profile of respondents offers an indicative picture of the women currently occupying locally or regionally elected executive office in Latin America. **The 101 women who participated came from all six countries analyzed, though distribution was uneven.** Colombia accounted for nearly half of all respondents, followed by Costa Rica, Ecuador, the Dominican Republic, Chile, and Panama.

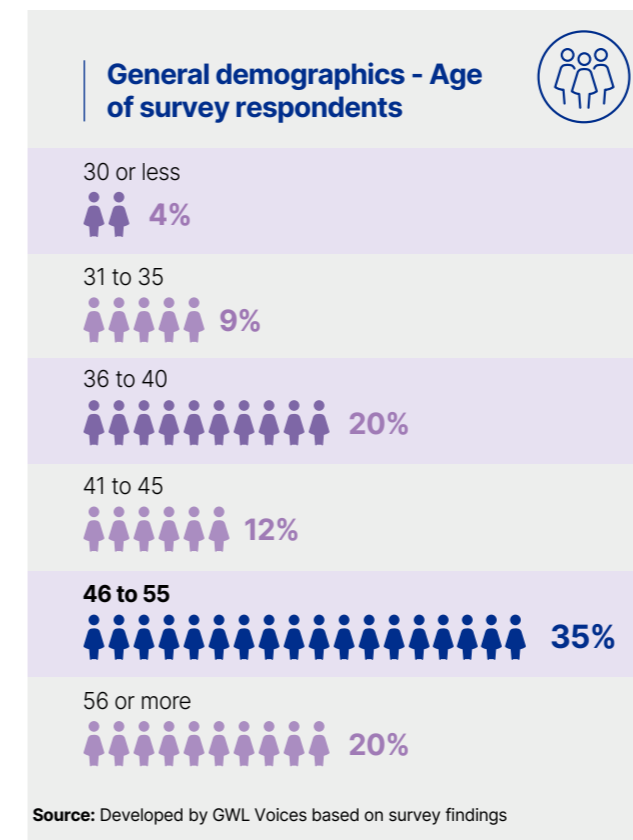
they were the first woman elected to their position, with 47.5 percent reporting they were, 48.5 percent indicating they were not, and 4 percent unsure. In addition, 82 percent of respondents were serving in office for the first time, **Most, 85 percent, reported political party affiliation, while a minority identified as independents.**



Source: Developed by GWL Voices based on survey findings

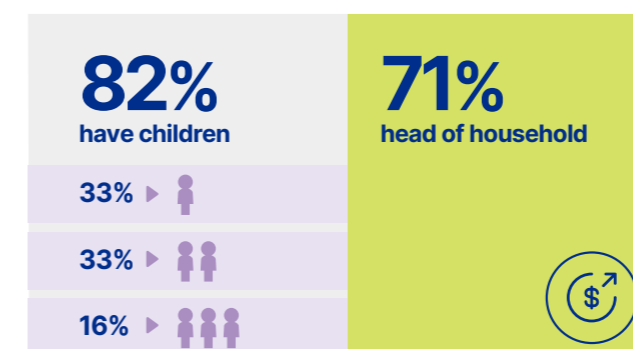
58. The term “semi-urban” is used descriptively in this report to refer to areas undergoing transition between rural and urban characteristics.

The age distribution showed that **two-thirds of respondents were over 40 years old**, with the largest concentration between 46 and 55 years of age. One-third were under 40, while women aged 30 or younger represented a very small fraction of the sample. **With respect to ethnic and racial self-identification, small shares of respondents identified as Indigenous (8 percent), Afro-descendant (9 percent), or mestiza (2 percent),** while the remaining eight in ten did not identify with any of these categories.



Source: Developed by GWL Voices based on survey findings

In terms of family composition, **more than four in five reported having at least one child, and around seven in ten identified as heads of household**, highlighting their dual responsibility as public leaders and primary income earners of their families.

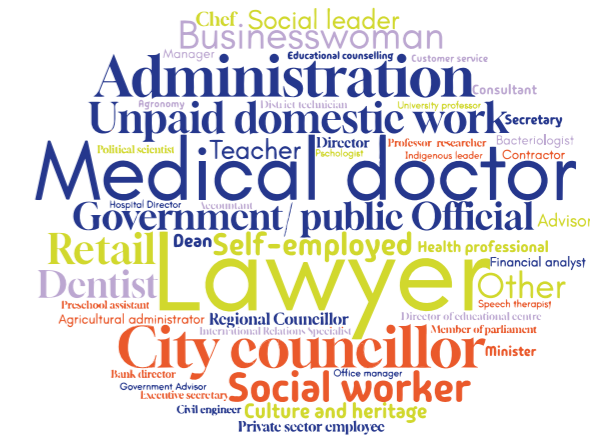


Source: Developed by GWL Voices based on survey findings

Respondents came from **diverse professional backgrounds**, with the most frequent occupations including law, public administration, education, and health, alongside smaller shares from business, social work, and community leadership.

This **distribution reflects varied professional trajectories into local politics, while also illustrating broader patterns of gendered occupational segmentation. The concentration of women in public service and social sector professions suggests that career pathways shape entry points into political leadership**, particularly through differential access to institutional networks and opportunities for public engagement.

Overall, the respondent profile reveals a **predominantly mid-career group of women leaders, most of whom are serving their first term in office, balancing political and family responsibilities, and operating largely within party structures.** These data provide the foundation for the following sections, which explore their motivations, career paths, and lived experiences in local executive leadership.



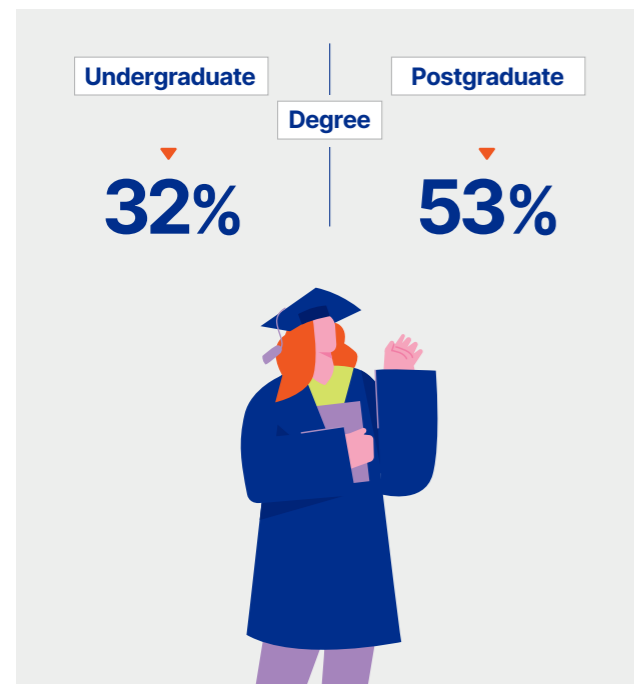
Source: Developed by GWL Voices based on survey findings. Note: The word cloud illustrates the relative frequency of professional backgrounds reported by respondents, with larger terms indicating occupations mentioned more frequently.

Characteristics and Motivations of Women Leaders⁵⁹

Survey findings reveal that **women in locally elected executive office are highly educated, politically experienced, and strongly motivated by social commitment.** Their profiles point to leaders whose entry into public life is grounded in professional expertise and community engagement, with a clear dedication to advancing equality and local development.

Educational attainment among respondents is remarkably high. Eighty-five percent hold a university degree, and more than half (54 percent) have pursued postgraduate studies at the master's or doctoral level.

This **pattern suggests that education often functions as an enabling factor for women seeking public office,** particularly in contexts where gender bias and credibility gaps persist. At the same time, it underscores that **access to political leadership is shaped not only by individual qualifications, but also by unequal access to educational opportunities and the structural conditions that mediate political participation.**



Source: Developed by GWL Voices based on survey findings

Women leaders also **bring substantial experience in public life.** Half of respondents reported having been **politically active for more than ten years,** indicating sustained engagement in civic or political processes before assuming executive roles.

This points to pathways to leadership that are rarely sudden but are more often the outcome of extended participation, requiring perseverance in environments where opportunities for advancement remain limited.

When asked about their pathways into politics, respondents most frequently identified social or community work as their main entry point (45 percent), followed by involvement in political parties (28.5 percent). **Grassroots activism therefore remains a crucial foundation for women's political participation, alongside the more formal route of partisan engagement.**

Motivations for holding elected office reflect a pronounced commitment to social improvement and inclusive governance. Virtually all respondents (99 percent) said their **primary motivation for running for office was to improve the lives of women and young people.** Similarly, 97 percent expressed a **broader desire to enhance community living conditions.**

In contrast, encouragement or support from their political party, cited by 55 percent of respondents, was the least frequently cited motivation for seeking office. These responses convey a shared sense of purpose oriented toward collective well-being rather than institutional endorsement, underscoring women's leadership as driven primarily by social commitment rather than institutional encouragement.



Source: Developed by GWL Voices based on survey findings

The **profile that emerges is one of highly qualified women leaders who combine education, experience, and social and political commitment.** Their professional credentials and community-based trajectories **challenge prevailing social perceptions of women as unprepared**

for leadership and indicate that greater representation of women in local executive office may contribute to making local governance more inclusive, equitable, and responsive to citizens' needs.

59. As noted in the methodology section, response rates varied across survey questions. The findings on educational background, political experience, and motivations are based on 84 respondents.

Barriers to Participation⁶⁰

Survey results confirm that women in local and subnational executive office continue to **face persistent, interconnected barriers that restrict their full participation in political life**. These challenges stem from both structural and cultural factors, including gender norms, party practices, media bias, and care responsibilities, that together shape women's access to and experience of leadership.

The **most frequently cited obstacle was gender stereotypes and discriminatory social norms**. Nearly three in four women (71 percent) identified these attitudes as barriers to their political participation, **reflecting how traditional expectations about leadership and gender roles continue to constrain women's opportunities**. These stereotypes often prioritize male authority or associate women primarily with caregiving roles, limiting perceptions of women's suitability for political leadership in many contexts. They vary across countries and intersect with other factors, including race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, shaping differentiated barriers to political participation. This is not simply a matter of perception. **Social attitudes translate into concrete disadvantages, influencing how women are evaluated as candidates, whether they receive support from party structures and communities and, in some cases, contributing to violence against women in politics**, which can both stem from and reinforce gender stereotypes, as recognized in regional normative frameworks such as the Inter-American Model Law on Violence Against Women in Politics.

These stereotypes were also found to intersect with economic barriers. Around two-thirds of respondents (61 percent) cited **lack of financial resources as a constraint on their ability to run effective campaigns**. While political financing frameworks in Latin America and the Caribbean often place greater emphasis on public funding and party-based resource allocation rather than individual fundraising, **access to funding remains a critical determinant of political viability for women, who often face greater difficulty securing campaign**

financing through party channels, private donors, or their own resources, particularly those experiencing intersecting forms of discrimination. Evidence suggests that, especially at the **local level, many women rely on informal support networks, community-based fundraising, and in some cases personal financial risk to sustain their campaigns**.

These dynamics highlight the need to address not only unequal access to resources but also the pressures and vulnerabilities associated with alternative financing strategies, and to strengthen equitable political financing mechanisms that enable women from diverse backgrounds to compete on equal terms.

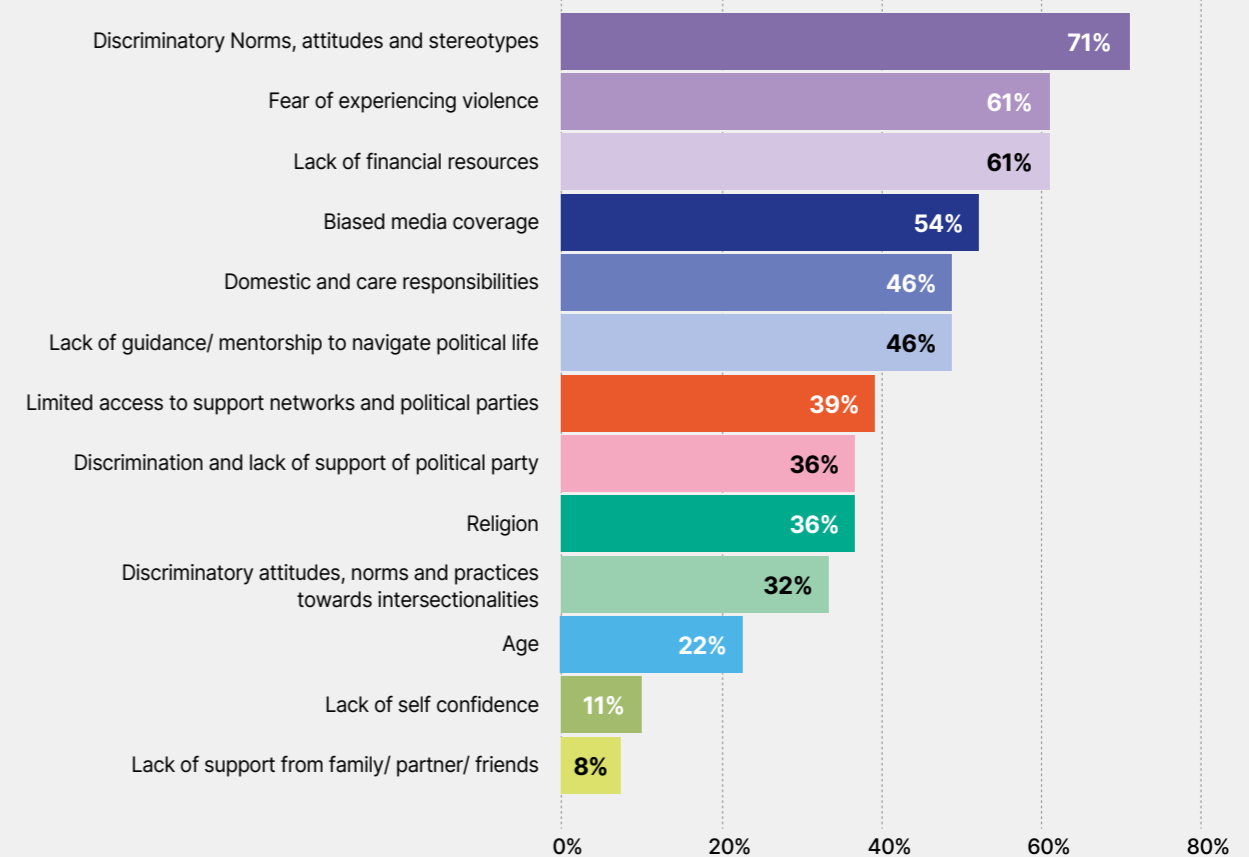
The role of political parties in either enabling or obstructing women's access to office also emerged as particularly significant. More than one-third of respondents (36 percent) reported experiencing **discrimination or insufficient support from their political parties, while 39 percent cited limited political networks and party access as barriers**. Despite most respondents confirming their party affiliation, the findings point to internal dynamics that often work against women's advancement. Candidate selection processes, access to resources, and campaign support frequently favor men, leaving women to navigate political pathways with less institutional backing than their male counterparts. While gender discrimination emerged as a central factor, respondents' experiences also suggest that barriers within party structures may be compounded by intersecting forms of inequality, including age, race and ethnicity, disability, territorial inequalities, and socio-economic background, which can further shape access to political networks, leadership opportunities, and decision-making spaces.

Additionally, nearly half of respondents (46 percent) noted a **lack of mentorship or guidance as a challenge**. Without experienced women leaders who can provide advice, open doors, and model successful trajectories, **many women find themselves isolated as they navigate political careers. This gap is particularly acute at the local level**, where few women hold executive positions and opportunities for peer learning are scarce, forcing

each woman to chart her own path rather than drawing on shared strategies and collective knowledge. At the same time, strengthening solidarity, peer support, and networks among women leaders can help transform individual experiences into collective pathways for advancing women's political leadership. This **finding underscores the importance of initiatives such as Women in Politics,**

which seeks to connect experienced international women leaders with local women authorities, creating pathways for knowledge exchange, strategic guidance, and collective action that can help dismantle the barriers women face at every level of political leadership.

Main barriers in the political careers of local women leaders (Moderate or significant barrier, % of respondents)



Source: Developed by GWL Voices based on survey findings

Note: Percentages represent respondents who identified each factor as a moderate or significant barrier.

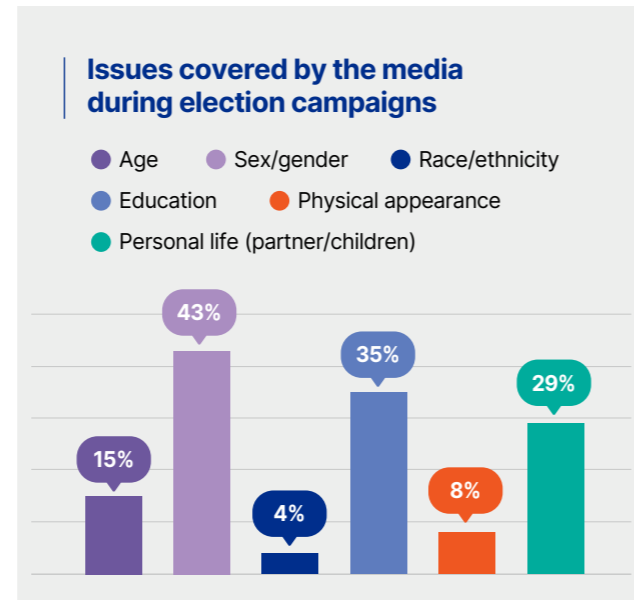
60. The findings on barriers to participation are based on responses from 84 respondents.

Beyond institutional barriers, about one in three respondents (31 percent) described **fear of violence or safety concerns as deterrents to political engagement**. In the context of this study, these **concerns primarily relate to violence against women in politics (VAWP), encompassing physical, psychological, economic, and symbolic forms of violence that seek to deter or punish women's political participation**. While this proportion is lower than for some other barriers, as will be examined in greater depth in the following subsection, its **prevalence underscores that women's political participation continues to take place in environments where safety risks remain a significant concern**. In several countries in the region, these dynamics unfold within broader contexts of political violence and insecurity, including the growing influence of organized crime, which can further intensify the risks faced by women candidates and elected authorities.

Personal and social factors add further layers of constraint. Roughly one in five respondents (22 percent) cited **age discrimination**, while 17 percent noted **lack of support from family or partners**. **Low self-confidence** was mentioned by 11 percent of respondents, a figure that likely reflects the cumulative effect of operating in environments that question women's capabilities and legitimacy. **Religious beliefs** were cited by more than one-third of respondents (36 percent) as shaping women's opportunities to participate in public life, indicating how cultural and religious norms can reinforce exclusion from political leadership.

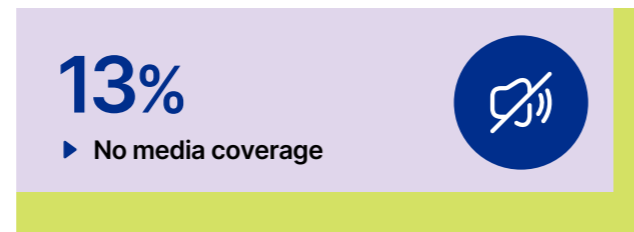
The barriers women face, however, go beyond the campaign trail and extend into how they are represented in public discourse. More than half of respondents (54 percent) reported experiencing **unfair or biased media coverage during their campaigns**. The form this bias takes is revealing. Nearly two in five women (43 percent) said **coverage focused primarily on their gender rather than on their political platforms or achievements**. One in three (35 percent) reported **disproportionate attention to their educational background**, and 29 percent said **media attention centered on their personal or family life**, issues rarely highlighted for male candidates. **This pattern**

of coverage reinforces stereotypes, frames women as exceptions rather than legitimate political actors, and limits public recognition of their credentials and policy positions.



Source: Developed by GWL Voices based on survey findings

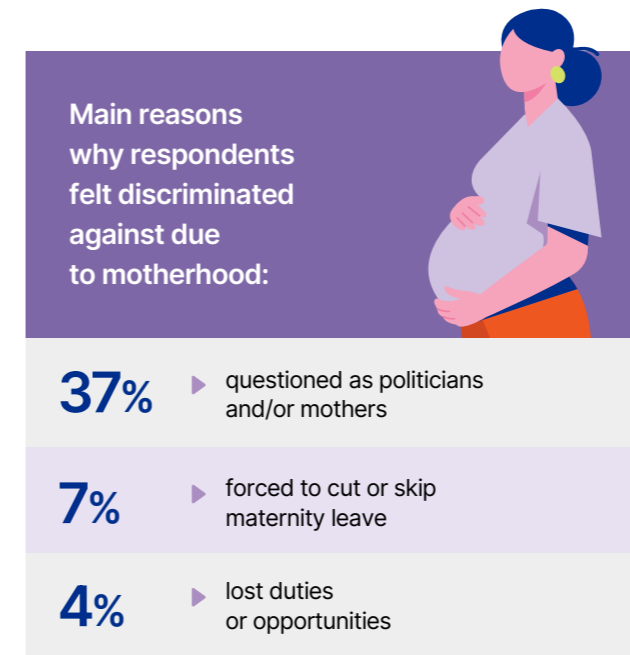
Visibility itself was also limited. About one in eight women (13 percent) received no media coverage at all during their campaigns, while over one-third (37 percent) were covered only through a single outlet, most often social media (35 percent). The concentration of coverage in social media, while providing some visibility, also reflects women's exclusion from traditional media channels that carry greater legitimacy and reach broader audiences. When women do receive coverage, it is often through social media or alternative digital platforms rather than traditional or mainstream media outlets, which can limit the visibility and perceived legitimacy of their voices in public debate.



Source: Developed by GWL Voices based on survey findings

Lastly, the **unequal distribution of care and household responsibilities stands out as among the most entrenched and persistent barriers**. The daily burden of care work reveals the extent of this imbalance⁶¹. Only one in four women (24 percent) spent less than one hour per day on care work, while two in five (42 percent) devoted two to four hours daily, and one in ten (12 percent) reported spending more than four hours per day on unpaid care. This unequal distribution of labor limits women's time, flexibility, and energy for political activity.

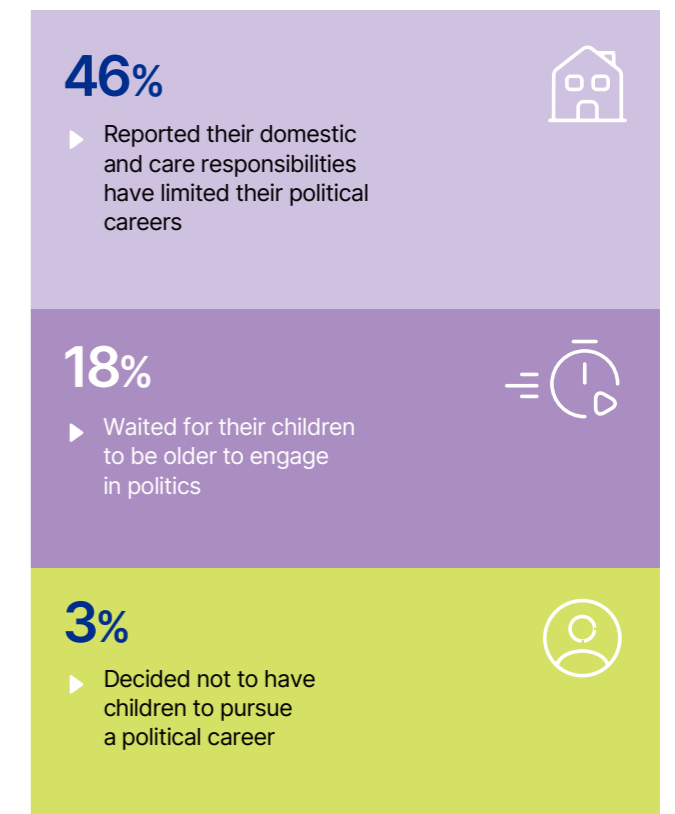
The impact of these responsibilities is substantial. Nearly half of respondents (46 percent) reported that **domestic and caregiving duties had restricted their ability to pursue or perform political roles**. But beyond the time burden, mothers also face direct discrimination. 47 percent of mothers said they had experienced **discrimination related to pregnancy or motherhood**. This discrimination takes many forms, from being forced to shorten or not take their maternity leave to facing questions about their ability to balance leadership and family.



Source: Developed by GWL Voices based on survey findings

Care responsibilities also shape the timing and trajectory of women's political engagement. Almost one in five respondents (18 percent) reported delaying their entry into politics until their children were older. While a smaller but notable group (3 percent) said they chose not to have children in order to pursue political careers. These figures reveal the **difficult trade-offs women face and the ways in which political systems fail to accommodate the realities of women's lives**.

Evidence from respondents suggests that, for many women, **decisions about entering political life are closely intertwined with family and care responsibilities**.



Source: Developed by GWL Voices based on survey findings

61. Findings on care and household responsibilities are based on responses from 74 participants.

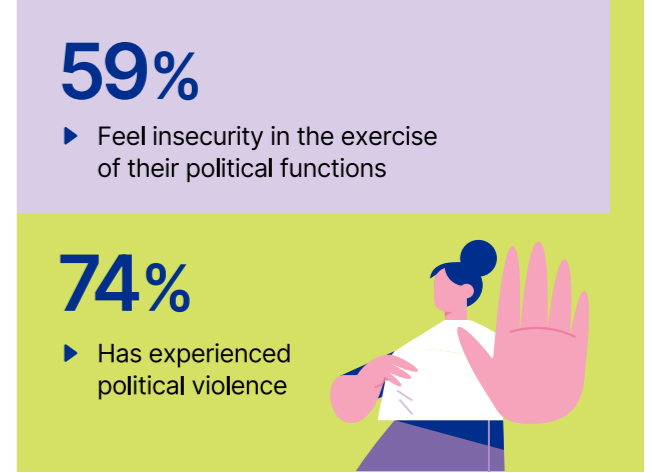
What these findings reveal is that **women’s exclusion from local executive office is not the result of any single barrier but of multiple obstacles that interact and reinforce one another.** Gender stereotypes, reinforced by media bias, shape voter perceptions of female candidates’ credibility and competence and influence how political parties evaluate and support them, affecting their access to financing and campaign visibility. Care responsibilities constrain the time available for the networking and relationship-building that political advancement requires, while violence against women in politics (VAWP) and the threat of such violence create environments where women’s participation itself carries risks. Together, these barriers create a **system of cumulative disadvantage in which each obstacle compounds the effects of others, making it far more difficult for women to enter political life, sustain their careers, and advance to positions of executive leadership.**

Therefore, although progress toward parity has improved women’s formal access to candidacy in some contexts, these findings suggest that **substantive equality, meaning the ability to participate and lead on equal footing, remains constrained by these persistent structural and cultural inequalities.** Addressing these barriers will require more than legal reforms. It will demand promoting women’s economic empowerment and advancing changes in party practices, political institutions, media and social media standards, and care policies, alongside efforts to transform the social norms that continue to frame leadership as incompatible with being a woman.



Violence Against Women in Politics at the Local Level⁶²

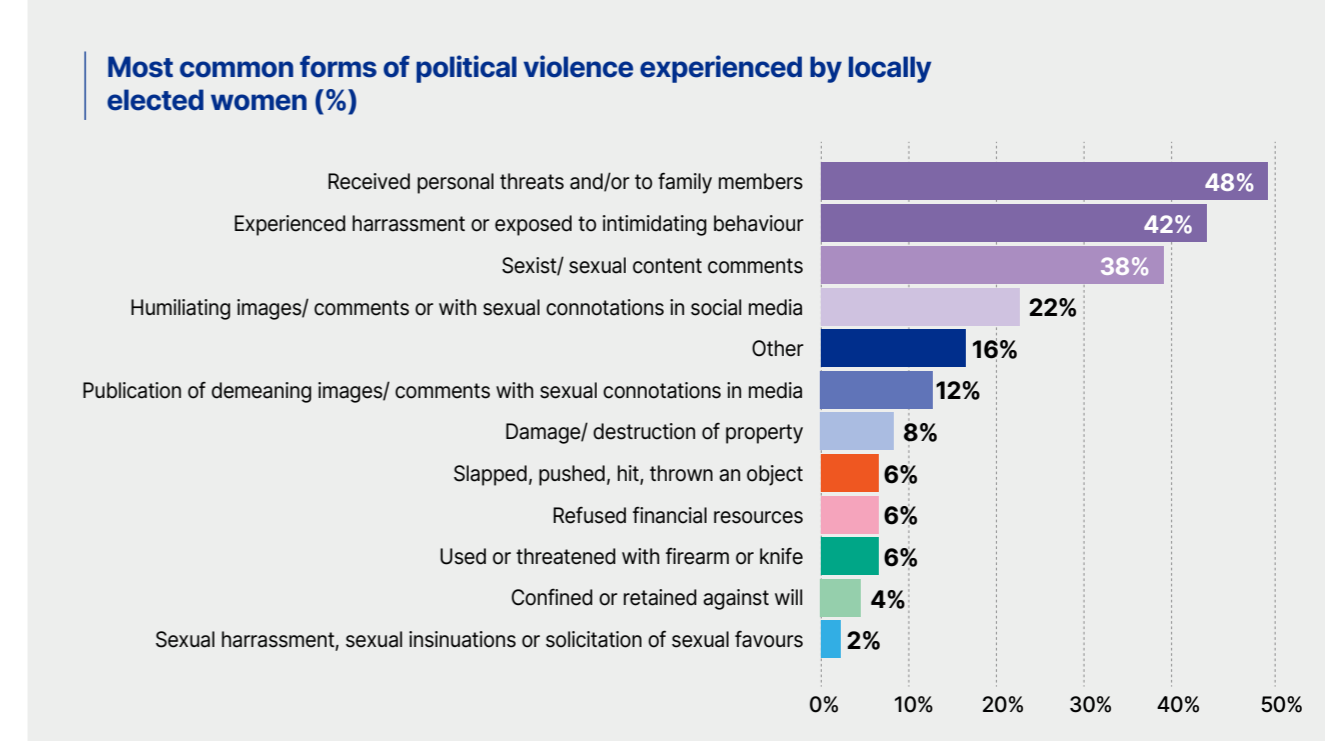
Nearly six in ten women in local executive office report feeling unsafe or insecure in the exercise of their political functions. Survey results confirm that these concerns are grounded in reality, with **gender-based political violence remaining a pervasive feature of women’s experience in subnational leadership. Almost three in four respondents (74 percent) have experienced some form of political violence during their careers.** The testimonies of women leaders reveal systematic patterns of threats, intimidation, and harassment that jeopardize their safety, constrain their political agency, and undermine democratic representation.



Source: Developed by GWL Voices based on survey findings

The **violence women face takes multiple, often overlapping forms.** Almost half of all respondents (48 percent) received direct threats, while two in five (42 percent) experienced repeated intimidation. More than one-

third (38 percent) were subjected to **sexist or sexually charged remarks**, and about one in five (22 percent) had **humiliating or sexualized images or comments circulated about them on social media.**

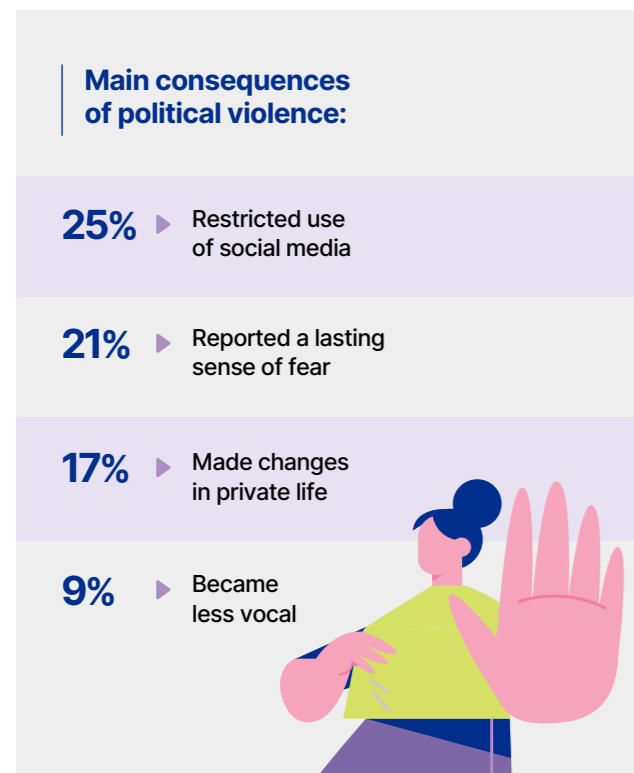


Source: Developed by GWL Voices based on survey findings

62. The findings political violence are based on responses from 68 participants.

Six percent of respondents experienced **physical aggression and/or threats involving weapons, while 4 percent were confined or restrained against their will.** A smaller but still significant share (2 percent) reported **sexual harassment or solicitation of sexual favors.**

Violence also operates through economic and symbolic means, with 8 percent of women having their **property damaged or destroyed** and 6 percent having been **denied financial resources to which they were entitled.** These findings show that gendered political violence extends beyond physical or verbal aggression to include deliberate efforts to restrict women's material resources and political autonomy. The repercussions of political violence, however, extend far beyond the immediate harm. One in four women (25 percent) **restricted their use of social media.** Seventeen percent made **changes to their personal lives** and nearly one in ten (9 percent) **became less vocal in public or political spaces.** Four percent **decided not to run for office again** and one in five (21 percent) reported a **lasting sense of fear.**



Source: Developed by GWL Voices based on survey findings

These are not merely individual consequences. When women withdraw from political life, curtail their public engagement, or silence themselves to avoid further violence, democracy itself is weakened. **Political violence does not simply harm individual women: it systematically excludes women from decision-making, distorts political competition, and undermines the legitimacy of democratic institutions.**

Despite the scale and severity of violence, **institutional responses remain inadequate.** Among those who experienced violence, more than half (53 percent) **chose not to report the incidents.** The reasons reflect significant institutional gaps: nearly half (48 percent) **lacked trust in the justice system,** while about one in three (30 percent) **did not initially recognize their experience as violence.** Others refrained from reporting out of **fear** (11 percent), **shame, or concern about damage to their political careers** (4 percent).



Source: Developed by GWL Voices based on survey findings

Among the minority who did file complaints, outcomes were largely absent: an overwhelming 97 percent stated that no action was taken against perpetrators or that they were unaware of any consequences.

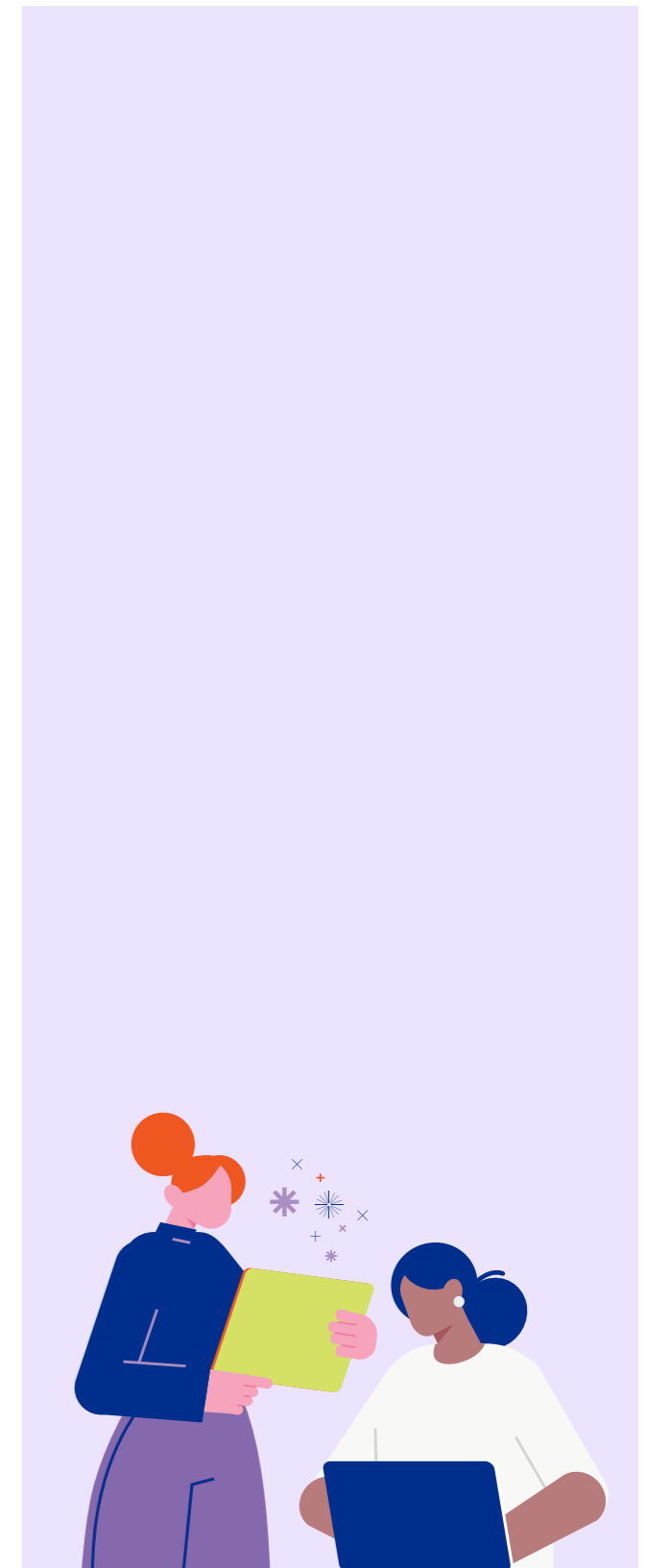
This **pattern of impunity indicates to perpetrators that political violence carries minimal risk, while discouraging women from seeking institutional remedies.**



Source: Developed by GWL Voices based on survey findings

The evidence presented in this section demonstrates that without strengthened accountability and enforcement, legal provisions against gender-based political violence remain insufficient. **The advances in women's formal representation documented elsewhere** in this report cannot be sustained if women who assume office face systematic violence and institutional indifference.

Ensuring women's full and effective participation in political life therefore requires not only opening doors to office but guaranteeing that women can exercise their mandates safely and without fear, intimidation or violence.



Spotlight: Colombia - Care Responsibilities and Gender-based Political Violence as Structural Barriers to Women's Leadership

A closer examination of Colombia's results brings into sharper focus how **two mutually reinforcing factors, unpaid care responsibilities and political violence against women in politics, shape women's access to, exercise of, and permanence in local executive office.**

Although a majority of survey respondents in Colombia reported that care and domestic responsibilities did not limit their political aspirations (73 percent), more than one in four women (27 percent) indicated that these responsibilities had constrained their political careers.

Among those who experienced discrimination during pregnancy or motherhood, the most common forms included having their political capacities questioned (67 percent), being judged in their role as mothers (55 percent), and, in some cases, feeling pressured to shorten or forgo maternity leave (11 percent). These experiences illustrate how deeply embedded norms around caregiving continue to shape women's political trajectories.

Feelings of insecurity were widespread among respondents, with 68 percent reporting that they felt unsafe while exercising their political functions. Nearly seven in ten also reported having experienced some form of political violence. Among those affected, the most frequent forms of violence, both online and offline, were severe. These included personal threats or threats against family members (74 percent), harassment or intimidation (26 percent), sexist or sexualized comments (32 percent), and the dissemination of humiliating or sexualized images or comments through traditional media (11 percent) and social media (21 percent). Respondents also reported more extreme acts such as confinement (11 percent), attacks involving weapons (16 percent), and physical aggression (5 percent), along with damage to property (11 percent) and economic violence (5 percent).

Taken together, these patterns expose the **dual pressure facing women in local executive leadership: the unequal burden of care and the pervasive threat of political violence.** Each on its own restricts women's ability to enter and remain in political life. **Together, they create compounded obstacles that shape not only who runs and who wins, but also who is able to serve safely and sustainably in public office.**

Colombia was selected for this spotlight because it had the largest number of survey respondents, providing the most robust country-level dataset in the study.



Beyond Representation: Women Leaders' Perspectives on Gender Equality and Democratic Governance⁶³

The views expressed by women in local and subnational executive leadership reveal a **strong commitment to equality, inclusion, and more gender-responsive political institutions.** Survey findings show that these leaders not only support efforts to expand women's representation but also see their presence in office as contributing to broader democratic and governance outcomes.

Support for institutional mechanisms to advance gender equality is nearly unanimous. More than four in five respondents (83 percent) expressed support for gender quotas, and almost all (95 percent) endorsed the achievement of full political parity. The strength of this consensus reflects **widespread recognition among women leaders that institutional reforms remain essential to addressing structural imbalances in political representation.**

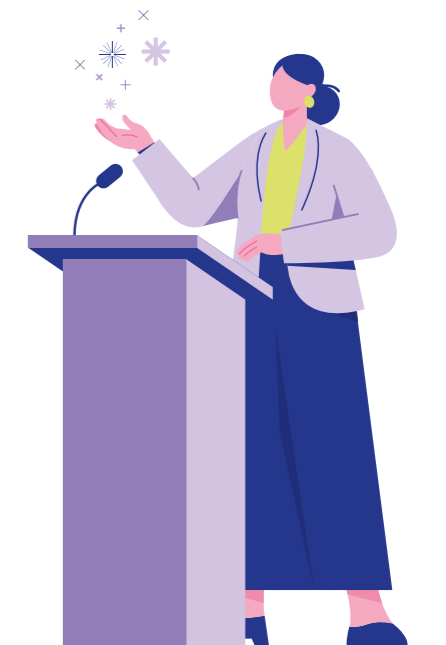
Perceived benefits of promoting women's increased participation in politics:

- 50% ▶ Increased understanding of gender equality issues
- 45% ▶ Increases trust in political system
- 39% ▶ Contributes to socioeconomic development
- 31% ▶ Promotes diversity and inclusion
- 23% ▶ Improves image and credibility of institutions
- 19% ▶ Positively influences the political agenda

Source: Developed by GWL Voices based on survey findings

Respondents also emphasized the **broader societal benefits of women's participation in politics.** Nearly all (98 percent) believe that **women's political leadership strengthens democracy and improves governance outcomes.** Half identified **enhanced public understanding of gender equality as a key impact of women's presence in office,** while 45 percent cited **increased trust in political institutions** and 39 percent pointed to **positive effects on socioeconomic development.** Others highlighted contributions such as the **promotion of diversity and inclusion** (23 percent) and **shifts in policy priorities and political agendas** (19 percent).

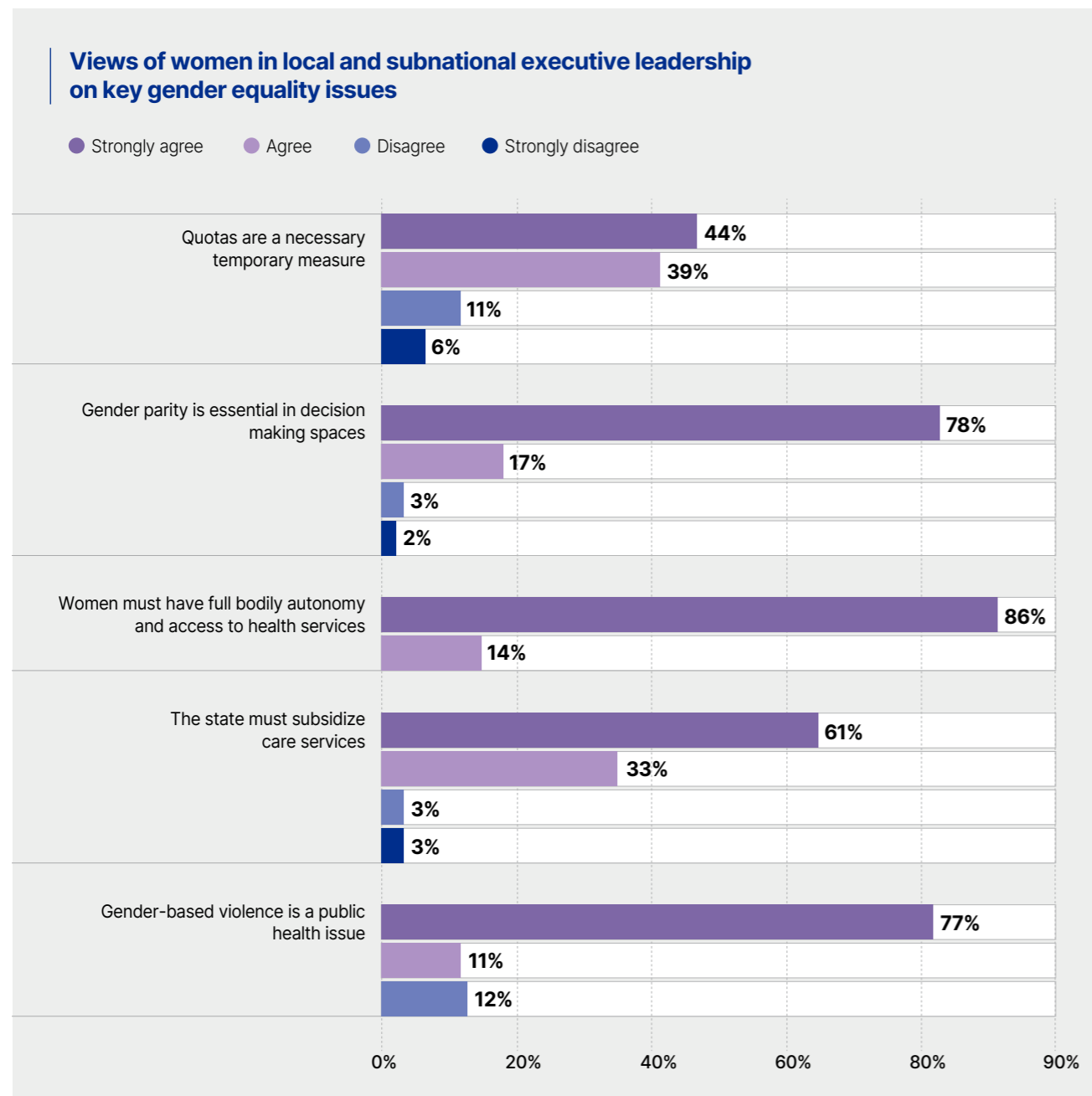
Women's commitment to gender equality however extends well beyond the electoral sphere. **Respondents unanimously affirmed women's right to bodily autonomy and unrestricted access to healthcare services** (100 percent), and an overwhelming majority (94 percent) supported full-time, subsidized state care services to help reduce the unequal burden of unpaid care work. A comparable share (88 percent) viewed **violence against women and girls as a public health issue requiring coordinated responses across health, justice, and social protection systems.**



63. The findings on perspectives regarding gender equality issues are based on responses from 64 participants.

Taken together, these findings indicate that **women in local executive office associate their leadership with democratic, social, and economic gains that reach well beyond individual representation.** Their perspectives

illustrate how advancing women's political participation contributes to stronger, more inclusive, and more responsive governance.

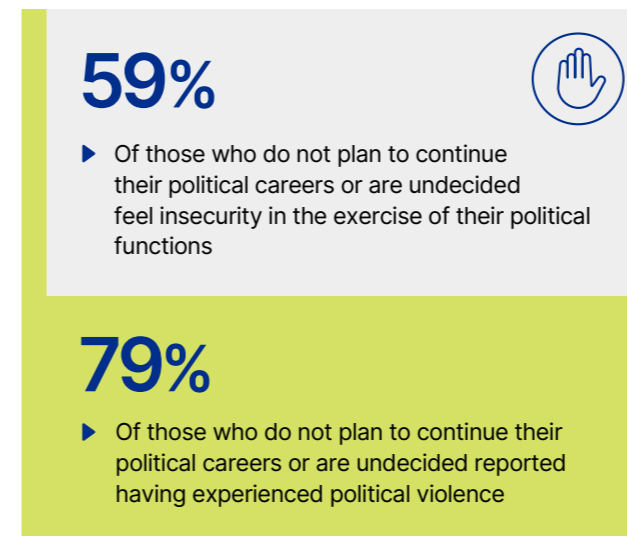


Source: Developed by GWL Voices based on survey responses.

Outlook and Retention: Commitment Amid Persistent Constraints⁶⁴

Despite the structural barriers, discrimination, and violence reported by respondents, **most women in local executive office remain committed to public service and political life.** Nearly three-quarters of respondents (73 percent) indicated a **desire to continue their political careers beyond their current mandate**, while one in five (20 percent) were uncertain and only 7 percent said they did not wish to remain in politics.

Among respondents who indicated an interest in continuing their political careers, **future trajectories spanned a range of roles within public office.** Around one-quarter (26 percent) expressed interest in becoming members of parliament, 24 percent hoped **to continue as mayors**, and 11 percent aimed to **serve as governors or prefects.** A smaller share (12 percent) wished to become ministers, while 5 percent aspired to **the presidency or other central government roles.** Only 1 percent saw themselves **leading a political party**, underscoring the continued difficulty women face in accessing senior roles within party hierarchies. However, the perspectives of those uncertain or unwilling to continue reveal the enduring pressures that constrain women's political trajectories. Among the 27 percent of respondents who indicated they do not plan to continue their political careers or remain undecided, nearly eight in ten (79 percent) had experienced some form of **gender-based political violence**, and close to six in ten (59 percent) reported **feeling unsafe while in office.**



Source: Developed by GWL Voices based on survey findings

Discrimination related to pregnancy or motherhood was cited by 36 percent, and 39 percent pointed to unpaid care and domestic responsibilities as major constraints. **Gender stereotypes** (65 percent), **lack of financial resources** (60 percent), and **insufficient support from political parties** (50 percent) were also identified as key factors limiting women's motivation and capacity to remain in political office.

The results suggest that **women's strong commitment to public service is often overshadowed by the pressures they face while in office.** Sustaining women's participation will therefore require not only parity in access but also institutional guarantees of safety, support, and equal opportunity throughout their political careers.



Source: Developed by GWL Voices based on survey findings

64. The findings on outlook and retention are based on responses from 84 participants.



Spotlight: Generational Differences in Women's Local Executive Leadership

An **age-based analysis of survey responses reveals both convergence and notable divergence in the experiences and perspectives of women local leaders under 40 and those aged 40 and above. Across most dimensions**, including motivations, entry pathways, barriers, experiences of political violence, and attitudes toward gender equality, findings point to **broad generational alignment**. Yet certain contrasts illuminate evolving dynamics in women's political leadership and suggest that younger women face distinct challenges even as they pursue the same goals as their older counterparts.

Women of all ages share a strong sense of public purpose. Younger and older leaders alike emphasized motivations rooted in community well-being and gender equality, highlighting a commitment to improving daily living conditions and expanding opportunities for women and youth. Younger respondents were somewhat more likely to cite a desire to gain leadership experience and develop new competencies (96 percent compared with 84 percent among those over 40), though **overall motivational patterns were strikingly consistent across cohorts. Entry pathways also showed little generational divergence.** Around half of women in both age groups entered politics through social or community work, and roughly one in three did so through political party activity. This continuity suggests that civic engagement remains the primary gateway into political life for women, irrespective of age.

Both age groups report facing entrenched structural and cultural obstacles to political participation, though the intensity and form of these barriers differ. **Younger women are more likely to identify discriminatory norms and stereotypes as constraints** (83 percent compared with 66 percent among those over 40) **and report heightened concerns about personal security** (75 percent versus 54 percent). Youth itself also emerges as a barrier for many of them: 39 percent of younger respondents cited **age-based discrimination**, compared with only 13 percent of older leaders, pointing to the compounded effects of gender and age bias. **Older women report similar challenges related to care responsibilities and financial constraints**, yet they are less likely to mention biased media coverage as an obstacle (49 percent compared with 64 percent among

younger counterparts). Overall, while **structural barriers affect women across generations, younger women appear to confront a more pronounced combination of gendered expectations, safety concerns, and age-related bias that shapes their pathways into political leadership.**

Rates of political violence against women in politics are high across both age groups, with roughly three in four women reporting at least one form of aggression or intimidation. The forms and spaces in which violence manifest, however, differ markedly by generation. **Younger women are significantly more exposed to online and sexualized forms of abuse:** 63 percent reported experiencing sexist or sexually charged comments, and 42 percent said such content was published in media outlets, compared with 23 percent and 13 percent, respectively, among those over 40.

Women aged 40 and above are somewhat more likely to report **in-person forms of violence, such as property damage** and, in much rarer instances, **being confined or restrained against their will.** In both groups, the repercussions are profound. About one in five women altered their personal lives or restricted social media use as a result of violence, and a smaller but concerning share became less vocal or reconsidered their political careers altogether. These patterns suggest that **violence adapts to the spaces women most often occupy: younger leaders face heightened abuse in digital environments, while older leaders encounter more established, offline forms of intimidation.**

Attitudes toward gender equality are overwhelmingly positive in both cohorts. Support for political parity and bodily autonomy is near universal, and more than nine in ten women across all ages favor state-subsidized care systems. **Minor differences emerge in perceptions of the broader benefits of women's participation.** Younger leaders tend to associate women's political leadership more strongly with increased trust in institutions (52 percent versus 41 percent) and the promotion of diversity and inclusion in public life (43 percent versus 24 percent). Older respondents, meanwhile, place slightly greater emphasis on contributions to social cohesion and socioeconomic development (34 percent versus 26 percent). These

differences suggest that **generational outlooks vary not in principle but in emphasis, reflecting distinct life experiences and policy priorities shaped by their respective stages in public and political life.**

The comparison reveals striking continuity across generations in women's political commitment and values, alongside emerging differences in lived experience and exposure to risk. **Younger leaders tend to face more gendered scrutiny, age-based discrimination, and online harassment, yet they also exhibit slightly stronger advocacy for institutional change and inclusion. Older leaders draw on sustained civic engagement and navigate more traditional forms of political exclusion and violence.** Taken together, both cohorts illustrate the diverse pathways through which women enter and navigate local executive leadership, even as they contend with persistent barriers that manifest in distinct yet interconnected ways. Recognizing these generational differences is essential for designing policies and support mechanisms that address the full spectrum of challenges women face throughout the course of their political careers.

Findings on generational differences in women's local executive leadership are based on responses from 84 participants.



KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

Key findings

The evidence gathered through quantitative analysis and direct testimony from women in local executive leadership across six Latin American countries reveals a **fundamental disconnect between formal commitments to gender equality and the lived realities of women in political life**. Three decades after the Beijing Declaration, and despite meaningful legal advances in several countries, **women's access to local executive power remains profoundly constrained**. The following section distills these insights into a set of overarching findings that reflect the central patterns identified across the six countries.

Legal frameworks matter, but design and enforcement matter more:

Where comprehensive parity provisions have been enacted and rigorously enforced, progress has been significant. Where frameworks remain partial, weakly enforced, or include escape clauses, women's representation has stagnated or regressed. A central limitation across several of the countries analyzed is that parity provisions still do not consistently apply to single-member executive positions or are insufficiently enforced where they do exist. This gap leaves mayoralties and governorships less protected by affirmative measures than other elected offices and contributes to persistent gender disparities in local and subnational executive leadership.

Women's exclusion from executive office follows a clear geography of power:

Across all six countries, women's representation in local executive leadership remains insufficient and far from parity, with only marginal progress over the past two decades. Women's presence in local leadership also declines sharply as jurisdiction size, political visibility, and resource control increase. Women govern predominantly in smaller, less visible municipalities while remaining largely absent from major urban centers and provincial capitals where political influence is concentrated. This pattern shows that women's concentration in smaller municipalities is not coincidental but reflects structural barriers that limit their access to the places where political power is most concentrated.

Generational and intersectional differences reveal additional layers of exclusion:

Age-related barriers intersect with gender discrimination, concentrating women's access to executive office in mid to late-career stages while largely excluding younger women. Indigenous and Afro-descendant women remain significantly underrepresented in local executive leadership, reflecting deep-rooted patterns of exclusion that extend beyond gender and age alone.

Barriers to women's political participation are not isolated obstacles but interconnected systems of exclusion:

Gender norms and stereotypes remain the most significant obstacles, shaping how parties select candidates, how media covers campaigns, and how voters evaluate competence. Economic constraints also limit campaign viability, particularly for women who receive less institutional support and face intersectional discrimination. Care responsibilities restrict the time available for political engagement. Although isolated measures have emerged in some countries, these efforts remain limited in scope and have not yet translated into comprehensive policy approaches capable of addressing care barriers across the full trajectory of women's political participation. In addition, violence against women in politics functions both as a consequence and a driver of exclusion, targeting women who enter politics while deterring others from doing so. Taken together, these barriers compound one another, creating cumulative disadvantage that legal reforms alone cannot dismantle.

Violence against women in local executive office is endemic, and institutional responses remain virtually absent:

Violence against women in local executive office emerges as a pervasive and deeply entrenched barrier, while institutional responses remain largely inadequate. Survey findings reveal that women leaders encounter multiple and overlapping forms of political violence, including threats, intimidation, sexualized harassment, and physical aggression. These experiences are not isolated incidents but reflect systemic patterns that undermine women's ability to exercise political leadership safely and effectively. The consequences are profound. Women report

PART 3

Key Findings and Recommendations for Action

03



restricting their public engagement, limiting their media presence, altering their personal lives, and, in some cases, withdrawing from political careers altogether. Despite these impacts, reporting remains limited, often due to low levels of trust in justice and accountability mechanisms. Where complaints are filed, responses are frequently insufficient or absent, reinforcing conditions of impunity and weakening institutional protections for women's political participation.

Despite facing systematic exclusion and violence, women in local leadership demonstrate unwavering commitment to public service:

Nearly all surveyed women expressed support for gender parity, universal healthcare access, state-provided care services, and recognition of violence against women as a public health issue. They overwhelmingly associate women's political leadership with strengthened democracy, improved governance, and positive social and economic outcomes. Their motivations center on improving community well-being and expanding opportunities for women and youth, rather than on personal ambition or alignment with party interests.

The evidence points to a conclusion that is both sobering and unequivocal. Incremental progress and partial reforms have not been enough to achieve substantive equality in local executive leadership. At the current pace, many women will remain excluded from the decision-making spaces that shape their communities and their daily lives. Women who express doubts about continuing in politics are also those most affected by violence, discrimination, and weak institutional support—illustrating how these barriers not only limit entry but also erode women's ability to remain and advance in political life.

Accelerating progress will require comprehensive and coordinated action to address the full range of obstacles documented in this report: strengthening and extending parity frameworks, ensuring accountability for political violence, reducing economic and care-related constraints, transforming party practices and media coverage, and challenging the social norms that continue to restrict women's political agency. The recommendations that follow build directly on this evidence and outline the measures needed from governments, electoral authorities, parliaments, political parties, civil society, and international partners to advance substantive equality in women's local executive leadership.

Recommendations for Action

1. Enact and enforce gender parity legislation across all levels of local and subnational governance, including both elected and appointed executive positions.

In line with CEDAW General Recommendation No. 40, as well as regional and international commitments to gender equality, parity requirements should be extended across all areas and levels of political and public decision-making, including both elected and appointed positions at the local and subnational levels. Achieving this objective requires legal frameworks that are comprehensive and enforceable. Parity frameworks should guarantee gender balance in candidate slates and party nomination processes and include clear enforcement mechanisms, such as the elimination of regulatory loopholes, effective sanctions for non-compliance, and systematic monitoring and public reporting on implementation. To ensure that parity measures benefit all women, legal frameworks should incorporate intersectional approaches and, where appropriate, include targeted affirmative measures to support the political participation of women facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination.

2. Adopt comprehensive legal frameworks on gender-based political violence, ensuring enforcement, accountability, and comprehensive protection and support services for victims and survivors of violence against women in politics.

Global and regional commitments increasingly recognize that ensuring women's right to participate fully and safely in political life requires comprehensive legal frameworks that clearly define, prevent, and sanction all forms of gender-based political violence, including physical, psychological, sexual, economic, and symbolic acts. Such frameworks should include accessible and safe reporting mechanisms, effective protection measures for women candidates and women serving in public office, and coordinated institutional responses that provide psychosocial, legal, and economic support to victims and survivors. Digital violence, which increasingly shapes women's political experiences, should also be explicitly addressed. Legal provisions should be supported by effective implementation, including timely investigations and prosecutions, particularly during electoral processes, as well as meaningful sanctions, so that violence against women in politics is met with accountability rather than impunity.

3. Incorporate care-sensitive policies into institutional and political frameworks to comprehensively address unpaid domestic and care responsibilities throughout the entirety of women's political careers.

Unequal care responsibilities continue to constrain women's political participation, affecting not only their availability but also the timing, continuity and sustainability of their political careers. Advancing substantive equality therefore requires integrating care-sensitive measures into electoral processes and public office. This may include providing care support during electoral campaigns and mandates for candidates and public officials with caregiving responsibilities, including for children, older persons, persons with disabilities, and people with long-term health conditions, alongside flexible work arrangements for elected authorities, equitable parental leave policies for both women and men in political office, and scheduling practices that acknowledge family responsibilities. By addressing unpaid care work across the full trajectory of women's political engagement, institutions can help ensure that women enter, remain, and advance in leadership on equal terms.

4. Establish sustainable, accessible and gender-responsive funding mechanisms to support women's candidacies, electoral campaigns, and sustained political engagement.

Economic barriers continue to limit women's ability to compete in elections and sustain political careers. Addressing these disparities requires gender-responsive political financing systems that enable women's participation at every stage, from candidacy through sustained public service. To this end, states, electoral authorities, and political parties should integrate a gender perspective into public and party-based financing frameworks. This includes earmarking funding for women's political participation, establishing incentives for parties that promote gender equality in candidate selection, and ensuring equitable access to campaign resources and capacity-building opportunities. Where such measures already exist, strengthening monitoring, transparency, and accountability mechanisms is essential. Electoral institutions should regularly assess compliance with financing regulations, publish disaggregated data on resource allocation, and apply effective sanctions for non-compliance.

5. Strengthen national data systems and integrate gender-responsive monitoring and evaluation frameworks into governance systems.

Persistent gaps in data continue to hinder the ability to track women's political participation and leadership globally. Without reliable, consistent, and intersectional data, neither governments nor civil society can fully assess progress or identify where barriers remain most entrenched. Strengthening national data systems is therefore essential. Electoral authorities and government institutions should adopt standardized mechanisms to collect and publish sex-disaggregated and intersectional data on political participation at all levels of government, covering both candidates and elected or appointed officials. Age, ethnicity, disability, political affiliation, and geographic jurisdiction should be included as a minimum. In parallel, governments should incorporate gender-responsive indicators into national and subnational planning, budgeting, monitoring, and evaluation systems. These indicators should measure not only representation but also women's influence, access to decision-making, and the extent to which governance outcomes address gender inequalities. Regular public dissemination of these statistics will enable evidence-based policymaking, enhance accountability, and make women's leadership visible within national and regional governance systems.

6. Ensure political party accountability for gender equality commitments, including the adoption of internal gender policies and regular public reporting on progress and outcomes.

Political parties remain the primary gatekeepers to elected office, yet in many contexts they continue to replicate practices that restrict women's advancement. Addressing this requires more than formal commitments and demands institutional transformation. Parties should embed gender equality within their internal rules and strengthen the role and capacity of women's or gender equality secretariats, including by ensuring their meaningful participation in internal decision-making processes. This should be accompanied by measures to promote gender parity in party leadership structures, establish transparent candidate selection processes, and ensure equitable distribution of resources. In parallel, creating leadership pipelines, establishing mentorship schemes, and publicly reporting on internal progress can help shift longstanding patterns

of exclusion. Political parties should also establish clear protocols and referral pathways to prevent and address violence against women in politics, alongside awareness-raising and training initiatives for party members. Electoral authorities can reinforce these measures by linking public financing to measurable improvements in gender equality and by enforcing parity requirements consistently.

7. Advance long-term social norms transformation by integrating gender equality education at all levels and promoting targeted efforts to transform institutional cultures in government and political spaces.

Discriminatory norms remain among the most persistent barriers to women's participation, shaping party recruitment, media portrayals, electoral support, and the day-to-day political experience of women leaders. These norms cannot be dismantled through legal reforms alone. Sustained investments in education, public messaging, and institutional culture change are therefore essential. Integrating gender equality content into school curricula, civic education, and training programs for public officials, including personnel within electoral and judicial institutions, can help shift perceptions across generations. At the same time, governments and political institutions must take active steps to transform the informal cultures and practices that perpetuate exclusion, ensuring that political spaces become safer, more respectful, and genuinely inclusive.

8. Improve media representation through equitable coverage guidelines and regulatory enforcement.

Media bias continues to shape public perceptions of women's leadership, reinforcing stereotypes that undermine credibility and limit visibility. Because these dynamics directly affect women's ability to compete on equal terms, media regulators, electoral bodies and public communication authorities should work proactively to promote fair and balanced portrayals of women in politics. Establishing and enforcing gender-sensitive coverage guidelines, supporting training for journalists and editors, and promoting the use of inclusive language and imagery can help shift entrenched narratives. In countries where public or regulated electoral media slots are allocated to political parties or candidates, regulatory frameworks should ensure their equitable use and promote gender parity in political communication. Regular monitoring by electoral authorities, including public reporting on

disparities in coverage and access to media platforms, can further strengthen accountability and help ensure that media environments support, rather than hinder, women's political participation.

9. Expand investment in leadership development, mentorship, and capacity-building programs for women at the local level, with a focus on reaching young women and those from historically marginalized communities.

Women's political leadership at the local level often develops in contexts where access to guidance, professional networks, and institutional support remains limited. Expanding leadership development, mentorship, and capacity-building programs can play a transformative role in strengthening women's participation and leadership pathways. Programs that connect experienced leaders with emerging women leaders, particularly young women and those from historically marginalized communities, help build skills, confidence, and collective strength. Supporting civil society organizations, academic institutions, and specialized training centers that design and implement these initiatives is essential to ensure their sustainability and reach. Such efforts should be coordinated across governments, political parties, civil society organizations, and international partners to ensure continuity throughout the trajectory of women's political careers, from entry to consolidation and advancement.

The **recommendations presented above are not isolated interventions but interconnected components of a comprehensive strategy to advance women's equal participation in local and subnational executive leadership.** Their successful implementation requires political will, sustained commitment, adequate resources, and coordination across multiple actors and sectors.

Women's leadership transforms communities and strengthens democracy. Yet, as this report shows, too many women in local executive office continue to confront structural barriers, gender-based political violence, and unequal access to power, simply because they are women. **Achieving genuine equality in political leadership requires not only legal and institutional reform but also a profound shift in political culture, one that values care, inclusion, and shared responsibility as pillars of governance.**

GWL Voices, together with its partners UCLG and UN Women, share the conviction that **when women lead, societies thrive.** Through the Women in Politics (WIP) initiative, this partnership will continue to amplify women's voices, expand opportunities for leadership, and support efforts to strengthen governance systems where every woman can participate, decide, and lead free from fear or discrimination. Strengthening women's leadership is widely recognized as contributing to more inclusive, responsive and democratic governance. **Ensuring women's equal presence in local executive office is therefore not only a matter of rights and justice, but also a strategic investment in the future of democracy.**



ANNEX: NATIONAL LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORKS ON WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

This annex provides a compilation of key legal and policy frameworks related to women's political participation in the six Latin American countries analyzed in this report: Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, and Panama. The information is presented in a standardized format to facilitate cross-country comparison and reference.

For each country, the annex documents:

- Ratification status of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), including both the Convention and its Optional Protocol
- Minimum age requirements for election to local executive office and voting age
- National laws and policies addressing gender equality and non-discrimination
- Legal frameworks on gender-based political violence
- Gender quotas and parity provisions applicable to local and subnational elections
- Other electoral quotas at the local level, including measures for youth and Indigenous peoples' representation
- Care-related laws and policies designed to support women's political participation

The compilation reflects the legal landscape as of early 2025 and is based on publicly available official sources, including national legislation, electoral codes, government policy documents, and reports from electoral authorities. Where no legal frameworks exist in a particular area, this is explicitly noted.

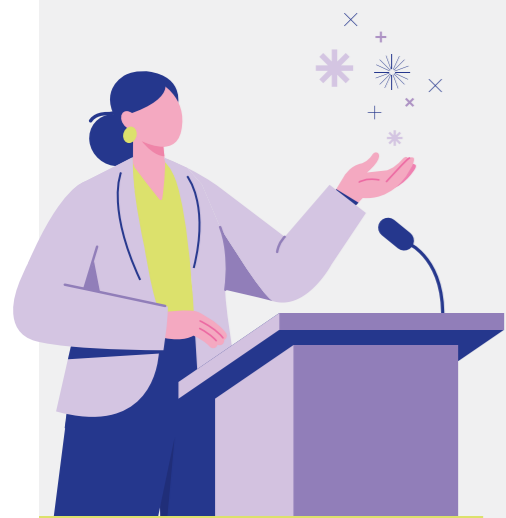
The official titles of laws and policies are presented in their original language to preserve legal accuracy.

This annex is intended to serve as a practical reference for policymakers, electoral authorities, civil society organizations, and researchers working to advance women's equal participation in local executive leadership. It highlights both progress achieved and critical gaps that remain in the legal and institutional architecture supporting women's political rights across the region.

ANNEX

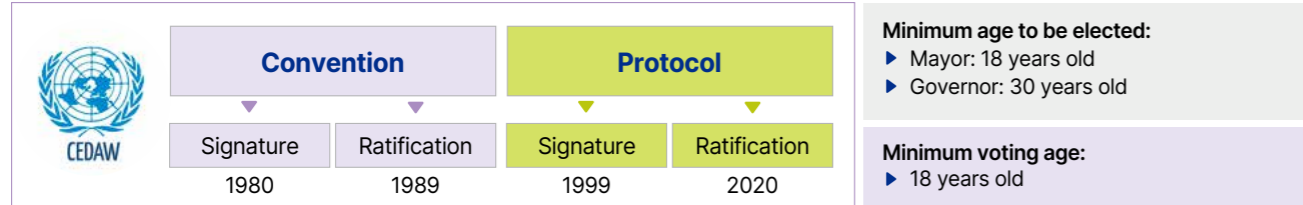
National Legal and Policy Frameworks on Women's Political Participation

04





Ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)



Gender Equality and Non-discrimination:

Law/ Policy	Summary
Ley N.º 20.820	This law establishes the creation of the Ministry of Women and Gender Equality as the governing body responsible for designing, coordinating, and evaluating public policies on gender, equality of rights, and the elimination of arbitrary discrimination against women, and mandates the obligation to incorporate a gender mainstreaming approach across all state policies, plans, and programs.
Plan Nacional de Igualdad 2018 - 2030	Chile's Fourth National Plan for Equality between Women and Men 2018–2030 outlines concrete policies through 2030 aimed at closing gaps across different areas of development and gender equality. It explicitly prioritizes women's political participation at the local level as part of its strategic focus, setting measurable targets and indicators for municipal and regional representation. The plan directs the State to work at all levels to ensure women's inclusion in local representative bodies and promotes partnerships among the ministry, regional governments, and municipalities to implement concrete actions. In addition, it establishes a goal for 2030 calling for the adoption of a 60/40 gender parity requirement in municipal and regional council electoral laws.

Gender-Based Political Violence:

Law/ Policy	Summary
Ley N° 21.675 Para Prevenir, Sancionar Y Erradicar La Violencia En Contra De Las Mujeres, En Razón De Su Género	Law No. 21,675, known as the Comprehensive Gender-Based Violence Law, explicitly recognizes political violence against women as one of its defined and sanctionable forms of violence.

Gender quotas and parity laws at the local level:

- For single-member elections, such as mayoralities, there are currently no quota requirements or gender alternation obligations in party nominations. In line with the objectives set out in Chile's Fourth National Plan for Equality between Women and Men 2018–2030, however, a bill has been introduced to extend gender quotas to mayoral, gubernatorial, and council elections. The proposal establishes a 60/40 quota, stipulating that in the candidacies presented by political parties, neither gender may exceed 60%. The initiative was approved in general by the Chamber of Deputies and endorsed by a Senate Committee as a mechanism to strengthen women's political representation. It remains under congressional review and has not yet been enacted into law.

- Law 20,840 (2015) establishes gender quota system for congressional elections. It requires that no gender exceed 60% of candidates, thereby ensuring a minimum of 40% women on party lists. This transitional measure applies to the 2017, 2021, 2025, and 2029 elections. The law also establishes financial incentives for both female candidates and political parties that comply with these requirements.

Other electoral quotas at the local level:

- **Youth:** There are currently no measures or quotas in place to promote youth representation in mayoral or regional governorship positions. It should be noted that, in the case of regional governorships, the minimum age to run for office is 30 years, which formally limits young people's access to this level of subnational executive leadership.

- **Indigenous peoples:** There are currently no measures or quotas in place to promote the representation of Indigenous peoples in mayoral positions.

Care-related laws/policies linked to political participation:

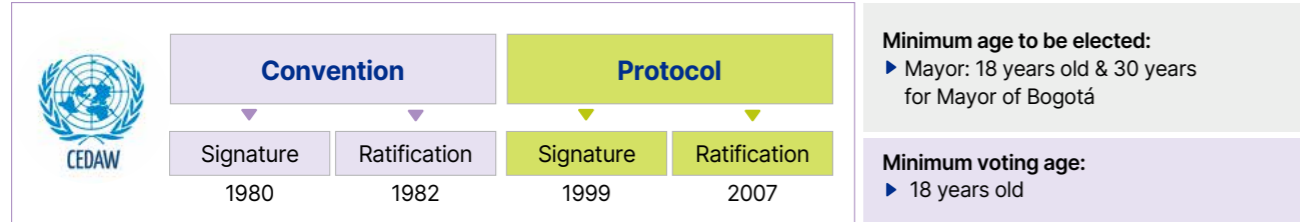
In 2021, the Electoral Service of Chile (SERVEL) incorporated into its Electoral Financing and Expenditure Consultation Manual the recognition of caregiving costs—covering newborns, children and adolescents, dependents, and older adults—under the category of “minor and frequent campaign expenses.” These costs were considered reimbursable electoral expenditures for candidates to public office, subject to a ceiling of 10 percent of the total authorized spending limit for the candidate or political party. This provision, which was maintained in the 2024 elections, represented a significant step toward lowering structural barriers and enhancing the conditions for women's participation in electoral competition.



COLOMBIA



Ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)



Gender Equality and Non-discrimination:

Law/ Policy	Summary
La Política Pública de Equidad de Género para las Mujeres: Hacia el Desarrollo Sostenible del País	<p>Defines the National Gender Equality Policy, aligned with the SDGs, setting goals to achieve greater representation and close gaps in areas such as education, health, work, and politics.</p> <p>One of its key pillars is the strengthening of women's political participation, both in elected positions and in territorial and community spaces. At the local level, it requires that municipal and territorial electoral lists (councils, community boards, and public offices) include at least 50% women candidates, with gender alternation, as a mandatory requirement for registration before the National Electoral Council.</p> <p>Additionally, this policy also promotes specific strategies for leadership and political training for women in rural areas and territories, recognizing rural differentiation as a central part of its actions.</p>

Gender-Based Political Violence:

Law/ Policy	Summary
Ley 2453 para prevenir, atender, rechazar y sancionar la violencia contra las mujeres en política y hacer efectivo su derecho a la participación en todos los niveles	<p>Comprehensive legal framework to prevent, address, sanction, and eradicate gender-based political violence. It recognizes women's right to a political life free from violence, without discrimination based on sex or gender. It protects their political and electoral rights, including the right to expression, assembly, and association. It clearly describes the actions, behaviors, or omissions that constitute political violence, and establishes the electoral authorities (the CNE or their equivalent) as responsible for implementing preventive and protective measures.</p>

Gender quotas and parity laws at the local level:

- For uninominal elections, such as mayorships or governorships, there are no quotas or gender alternation obligations for political parties in electoral lists.
- Law 581 on Regulating the Participation of Women at the Decision-making Levels of the Different Branches and Organs of Public Power, 2000 (amended in 2008), mandates that at least 30% of high-level public positions (across various branches and levels) be held by women. This applies to roles filled via ternas (shortlists), where at least one nominee must be female. It does not apply directly to elected roles like mayors or governors.
- In 2015, a constitutional reform also introduced principles of parity, universality, and alternation — requiring that at least 50% of political participation spaces are women (parity), that quotas apply across all institutions (universality), and that candidate lists alternate genders (alternation). However, this continues to focus on list-based elections, such as legislative assemblies—not single-seat offices like mayors and governors.

Other electoral quotas at the local level:

- **Youth:** There are currently no measures or quotas in place to promote youth representation in mayoral or gubernatorial elections. Youth political participation is instead promoted through consultative and participatory mechanisms established under Ley 1622 de 2013, as amended by Ley 1885 de 2018, which created Youth Councils at municipal, departmental, and national levels but does not establish electoral quota provisions. It should be noted, however, that in the case of the Mayorship of Bogotá (*Alcalde/sa Mayor de Bogotá*), the minimum age to run for office is 30 years, which formally limits young people's access to this prominent local executive office.
- **Indigenous peoples:** There are currently no measures or quotas in place to promote the representation of Indigenous peoples in mayoral or gubernatorial elections.

Care-related laws/policies linked to political participation:

Colombia adopted Law 2436 of 2024, which establishes a maternity leave modality allowing women serving in collegiate public bodies (including members of Congress, departmental deputies, and municipal councilors) to perform their political duties remotely during maternity leave. However, the law does not apply to single-person executive offices, such as mayoralties or governorships.

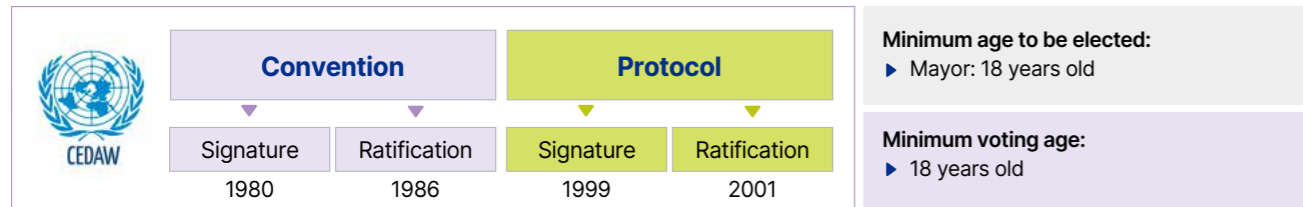
COLOMBIA



COSTA RICA



Ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)



Gender Equality and Non-discrimination:

Law/ Policy	Summary
Ley de Promoción de la Igualdad Social de la Mujer (Originally Law 7142 → later renumbered as Ley 7801 in 1990)	<p>The Ley de Promoción de la Igualdad Social de la Mujer (Law for the Promotion of Women's Social Equality) - originally Law 7142 and later renumbered as Law 7801 - is a fundamental regulation within the Costa Rican legal framework to guarantee equality between women and men, and as such has a direct impact on women's political participation.</p> <p>It has served as a key reference and legal basis for the creation of Law 10235 on political violence against women, the establishment of the minimum 40% quota for female candidacies (Law 8765 of the Electoral Code, 2009), and the subsequent progress toward parity and alternation (50/50) in electoral lists. It also lay the foundation for the National Policy for Gender Equality and Equity (PIEG).</p>
Política Nacional para la Igualdad y Equidad de Género (2007 2017 and 2018 2030)	<p>State strategy promoted by the Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres (National Women's Institute) in Costa Rica to guarantee women's rights and eliminate structural discrimination.</p> <p>The first phase (2007–2017) addressed issues such as political participation, gender-based violence, work, caregiving, and health, driving key legal reforms and institutional plans. Its extension (2018–2030) consolidates this framework, focusing on the redistribution of power, time, and resources between men and women through coordinated action by public institutions, local governments, and social organizations, with mechanisms for monitoring, evaluation, and accountability.</p> <p>The PIEG identifies women's political participation, especially at the municipal level, as a strategic priority. It recognizes that women face greater structural barriers at the local level, and therefore promotes legal reforms, affirmative actions, training, and institutional strengthening to ensure a truly effective parity-based democracy from the ground up.</p>

Gender-Based Political Violence:

Law/ Policy	Summary
Ley para prevenir, atender, sancionar y erradicar la violencia contra las mujeres en la vida política (Ley 10235 – 2022)	<p>Approved in 2022, Law 10235 recognizes that women face specific and systematic forms of violence when participating in politics. Its objective is to protect their political rights and guarantee their full participation, free from violence and discrimination.</p> <p>Law 10235 makes explicit reference to the local and municipal sphere, as it acknowledges that many forms of political violence occur precisely in the most immediate levels of power, such as local governments and municipal and district councils. Among law requires among other measures the creation of prevention and sanction mechanisms at the local level, including the implementation of protocols in cantonal political parties and training for municipal authorities.</p>

Gender quotas and parity laws at the local level:

Law/ Policy	Summary
Código Electoral, 2009 (Ley 8765) —updated in 2022	<p>The law enshrines the principle of parity and alternation, guaranteeing equal political participation of women and men at all levels, including local and municipal.</p> <p>It establishes that candidate lists and elected bodies must be composed of 50% women and 50% men, with a maximum difference of one, and that lists must alternate by sex (woman–man or man–woman) so that no two candidates of the same sex appear consecutively. The law further requires the Electoral Registry to reject any lists that do not comply with these provisions.</p>

Other electoral quotas at the local level:

- **Youth:** There are currently no measures or quotas in place to promote youth representation in mayoral positions.
- **Indigenous peoples:** There are currently no measures or quotas in place to promote the representation of Indigenous peoples in mayoral positions.

Care-related laws/policies linked to political participation:

There are currently no laws or policies on care specifically designed to promote greater political participation of women, including at the local level.

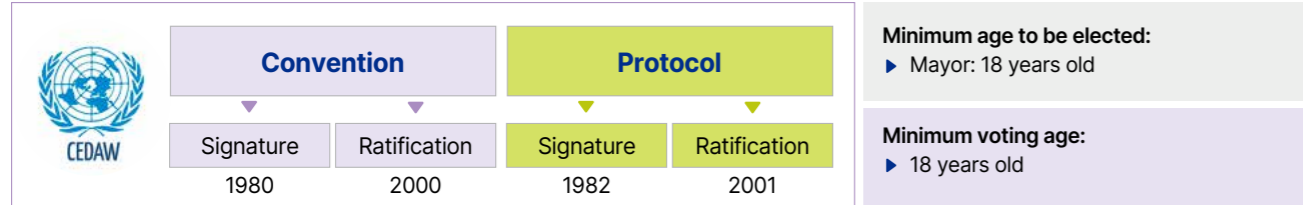


COSTA RICA



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

Ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)



Gender Equality and Non-discrimination:

Law/ Policy	Summary
Plan Nacional de Igualdad y Equidad de Género (PLANEG III 2020–2030)	<p>The National Plan for Gender Equality and Equity III (2020–2030), led by the Ministry of Women, is a comprehensive policy grounded in the Constitution (Art. 39), the National Development Strategy, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It includes seven thematic areas—health, education, environment, economy, violence, citizenship, and technology—and adopts an intersectional approach to address the multiple forms of discrimination women face.</p> <p>The plan seeks to advance three key dimensions of autonomy: economic (access to employment, assets, and credit), decision-making (political empowerment and leadership), and physical (sexual health and violence prevention). It also promotes cultural transformation, institutional strengthening, and citizen participation. To ensure effective implementation, it establishes mechanisms for inter-institutional coordination, continuous training, the use of sex-disaggregated data, and monitoring with indicators and periodic evaluations.</p> <p>The plan defines women’s political participation as an essential component of autonomy, including their presence in elected office, ministerial cabinets, and local government. Within Component 4, Citizenship, Democracy, and Social and Political Participation, the plan aims to promote cultural change and expand women’s presence in leadership roles at both central and local government levels; strengthen their access to elected office by ensuring compliance with parity laws and reforming legal barriers; adapt legislation such as the Municipal Law to guarantee equal candidacies at the local level; and enhance women’s participation in local government through legal and regulatory reform, gender mainstreaming, and digital training for mayors, councilwomen, and other officials.</p>

Gender-Based Political Violence:

Law/ Policy	Summary
Law N° 20-23	The Organic Law of the Electoral Regime, typifies and seeks to eradicate political violence against women within the framework of electoral offenses. Article 316(21) establishes criminal sanctions of one (1) to three (3) years of imprisonment for acts that restrict or undermine the political rights of women on the basis of gender.

Gender-Based Political Violence:

Law/ Policy	Summary
Ley 176-07	The law requires gender alternation in mayor–deputy mayor tickets (or síndico and vice-síndico in the National District). Parties must ensure that if the mayoral candidate is a man, the deputy mayoral candidate is a woman, and vice versa.

Electoral Law No. 20-23, adopted in 2023, also establishes that the Central Electoral Board will not accept any list of candidates for popularly elected office that includes less than 40% or more than 60% of either men or women. However, this quota does not apply to single-office positions such as mayors.

Other electoral quotas at the local level:

- **Youth:** There are currently no measures or quotas to promote youth representation in mayoral races. The 10% youth quota established by Law 33-18 applies only to multi-member positions such as municipal councillors and board members, not to the single-office posts of mayor and deputy mayor.
- **Indigenous peoples:** There are currently no measures or quotas in place to promote the representation of Indigenous peoples in mayoral races.

Care-related laws/policies linked to political participation:

There are currently no laws or policies on care specifically designed to promote greater political participation of women, including at the local level.

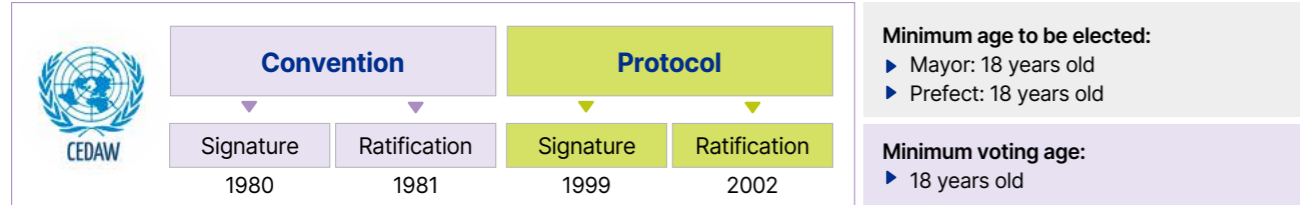
DOMINICAN REPUBLIC



ECUADOR



Ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)



Gender Equality and Non-discrimination:

Law/ Policy	Summary
Agenda Nacional para la Igualdad de Género (2021–2025)	<p>The National Gender Equality Agenda (2021–2025), developed by the National Council for Gender Equality (CNIG), strengthens actions in health, education, violence prevention, employment, technology, and political participation.</p> <p>It identifies political participation and decision-making as one of its nine priority areas, with measures to expand women's access to and presence in regional and local power structures. The agenda also calls on ministries, prefectures, municipalities, and parish councils to implement local policies that promote women's political rights within their communities.</p>

Gender-Based Political Violence:

Law/ Policy	Summary
Ley Orgánica Integral para Prevenir y Erradicar la Violencia Contra las Mujeres (LOIPEVM, 2018)	The law explicitly defines gender-based political violence as one of the prohibited forms of violence against women and recognizes that this type of violence includes actions or omissions that restrict the exercise of women's political rights.
Código de la Democracia (reformas 2020)	This law classifies gender-based political violence as a very serious electoral offense and establishes sanctions such as fines, removal from office, and suspension of political rights for up to four years.

Gender quotas and parity laws at the local level:

Law/ Policy	Summary
Ley Orgánica Electoral y de Organizaciones Políticas (Código de la Democracia)	<p>In 2025, the National Assembly overwhelmingly approved a reform to the Ley Orgánica Electoral y de Organizaciones Políticas (Código de la Democracia) that ratified the principle of gender parity in candidate slates — including both uninominal and plurinominal races.</p> <p>The reform makes gender parity (50 % women, 50 % men) with alternation in ordering mandatory across all electoral dignities, including single-seat races (like mayoral elections) and binomial tickets (such as president/vice president or prefect/vice-prefect). This is a notable expansion beyond previous rules, where parity had been primarily enforced in plurinominal lists, but was not explicitly required for single-seat candidacies or executive tickets.</p>

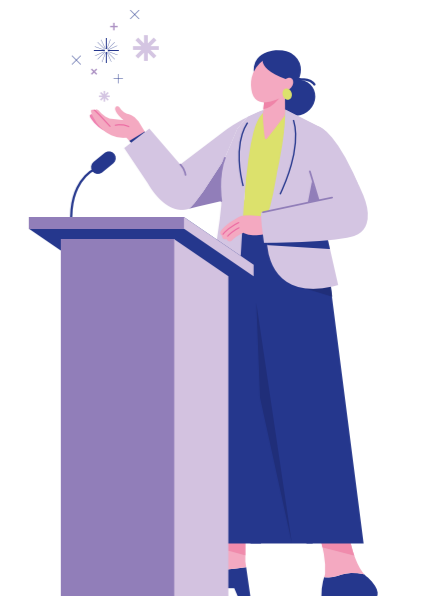
Other electoral quotas at the local level:

- **Youth:** There are no youth quotas for mayoral or prefectural races in Ecuador. The 25% youth quota established in Ecuador's Organic Law on Youth, approved October 25 2022 (an amendment to the Código de la Democracia), applies only to binominal and multi-member (pluripersonal) positions.
- **Indigenous peoples:** There are currently no measures or quotas in place to promote the representation of Indigenous peoples in local governments.

Care-related laws/policies linked to political participation:

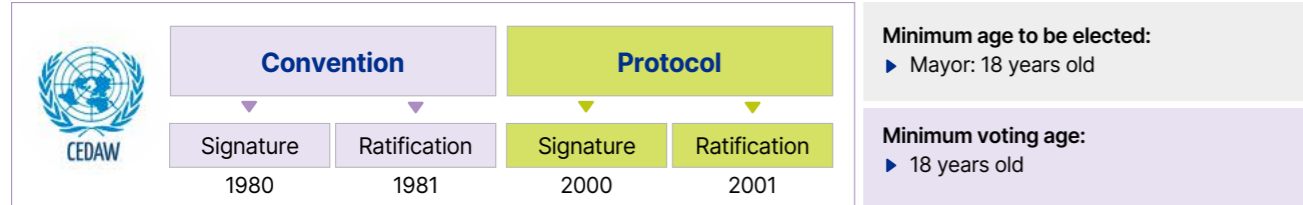
There are currently no laws or policies on care specifically designed to promote greater political participation of women, including at the local level.

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Ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)



Gender Equality and Non-discrimination:

Law/ Policy	Summary
Ley N° 4 de 29 de enero de 1999 – Igualdad de Oportunidades para las Mujeres	<p>Law N°4 prohibits discrimination and promotes equal conditions in the public, private, and family spheres.</p> <p>In Chapter I, Article 1, it recognizes women's right to participate fully and equally in political, social, economic, cultural, and family life, prohibiting all forms of sex-based discrimination.</p>
Política Pública de Igualdad de Oportunidades para las Mujeres 2024–2034	<p>Approved in June 2024, the policy establishes a strategic framework grounded in human rights, political, economic, social, and institutional empowerment, and intersectoral monitoring.</p> <p>Among its objectives, it seeks to guarantee women's political participation based on the principles of parity and gender equality set out in electoral and human rights norms. To achieve this, it promotes political empowerment programs that ensure women's appointment in local and municipal management, raises awareness of women's right to participate in local politics, and advances their equal representation in state, municipal, community, and party structures.</p>

Gender-Based Political Violence:

Law/ Policy	Summary
Ley 184-2020 de violencia política	<p>A pioneering law to combat gender-based political violence, applicable at all levels, including the municipal. It establishes concrete obligations for authorities and political parties regarding prevention, reporting, response, and sanctions.</p> <p>The law defines political violence as any act, conduct, or omission, whether direct or through third parties, that—based on gender—causes harm to women and seeks to undermine or restrict the recognition, enjoyment, or exercise of their political rights.</p>

Gender quotas and parity laws at the local level:

Law/ Policy	Summary
Código Electoral	The Electoral Code of 1983 (as amended through 2021) requires political parties to uphold gender parity and equality. Candidate lists must be composed of 50% men and 50% women. For single-seat elections, including mayoral races, the principal candidate and the substitute must be of different sexes. The law further stipulates that the Electoral Court will not approve any applications that fail to meet these conditions.

Other electoral quotas at the local level:

- **Youth:** There are currently no measures or quotas in place to promote youth representation in mayoral races.
- **Indigenous peoples':** There are currently no measures or quotas in place to promote the representation of Indigenous peoples in mayoral positions.

Care-related laws/policies linked to political participation:

There are currently no laws or policies on care specifically designed to promote greater political participation of women, including at the local level.



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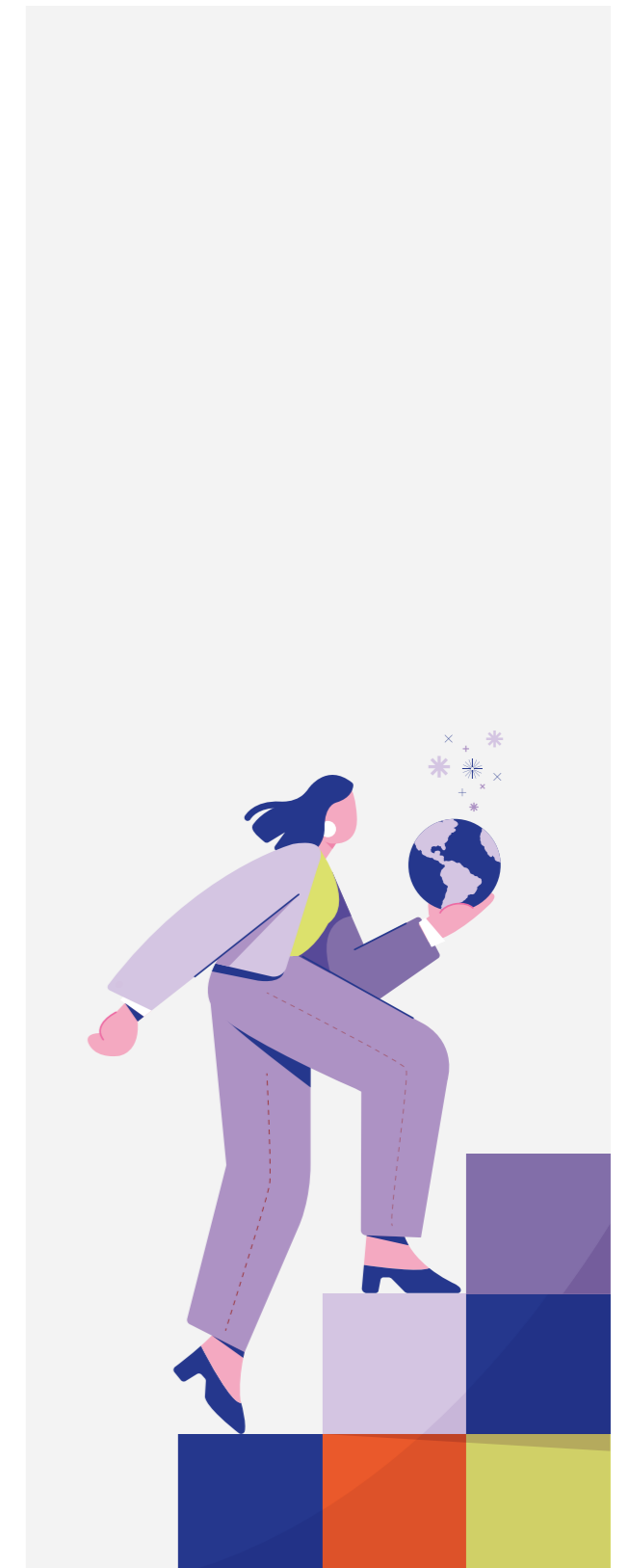
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Claudia Briones Smith is a gender equality specialist with more than twenty years of experience across public policy, international development cooperation, and the multilateral system. She has worked with a range of international organizations and institutions, including the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID), the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), and the Ibero-American General Secretariat (SEGIB), where she served as Director of the Gender Unit from 2015 to 2024. In these roles, she contributed to the development of regional and global initiatives to advance gender equality and women's empowerment, with thematic experience spanning areas including HIV and AIDS, violence against women and girls, women's economic empowerment, and women's political participation and leadership. She currently works as an international consultant and serves as Coordinator of the Women in Politics initiative at GWL Voices for Change and Inclusion (GWL Voices), contributing to research, knowledge generation, and policy dialogue on women's leadership at the local and subnational levels.





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