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Bachelor's in Politics, Philosophy and Economics

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The Gender Gap in Politics:  
The Paradox of *Machismo* and *Presidentas* in Latin America

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## Acronyms

CAWP	Center for American Women and Politics
CEDAW	Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CPD	Concertación de los Partidos por la Democracia
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
IDEA	Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance
IFES	International Foundation for Electoral Systems
ILO	International Labour Organization
INFF	Integrated National Financing Frameworks
IPU	Inter-Parliamentary Union
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
NWC	National Women's Congress
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UN	United Nations
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
WBG	World Bank Group
WEF	World Economic Forum

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## Introduction

*“No country can ever truly flourish if it stifles the potential of its women and deprives itself of the contribution of half its citizens.”*

(Michelle Obama, 2014).

Gender equality is not merely a fundamental human right, but an essential basis for a peaceful, flourishing, and sustainable world (United Nations, 2021). Women, in fact, represent half the world’s population, and thus also half of its potential (United Nations, 2021). Even if some progress has been achieved throughout the years, for instance more girls are getting their education and more women are getting selected for positions of leadership, it is worth mentioning that there are many challenges that still need to be faced. In other words, even if at the present time most developed countries guarantee women the same opportunities as men when it comes to access to education and the labor market, an actual equality of outcome is still not ensured, chiefly due to the several stereotypical images of leadership associated with masculinity, that society has been fed with throughout history.

The political arena is perhaps one of the worst domains with the lowest levels of gender equality and representation. Research shows, in fact, that women around the world are still exposed to physical, sexual, economic, and psychological discrimination for choosing to participate in politics, even if to different extents depending on various factors, such as the country’s government, policies, or traditional gender norms (UN Women, 2014). Hence, women are underrepresented in political offices worldwide, and their underrepresentation increases in more high-ranking positions. In other words, when it comes to career and leadership, and more generally to male dominated areas, as the political one, there is always the tendency to prefer male leaders to female ones. For this reason, there exist different theories studying and analyzing the status of women in these situations that will be analyzed in the following sections.

Economically speaking, gender inequalities related to workplace and remuneration fall under the label of the gender pay gap. Regarding the causes, research from many countries shows that overt pay discrimination only potentially explains a small part of the gender pay gap. Many hypotheses have been brought up in this regard, the most notorious are certainly the different personal and professional characteristics, the preferred hours of work, as well as women grouping in traditionally feminine industries, not to mention the fact that in most countries it was once perfectly legal to pay women less. The real problem, however, lies in the lack of equal opportunity. Hence, having established that the gender pay gap is not caused by women earning less than men for the same job, then it is clear that the reason is largely based on a different career-path. In fact, what really holds them back, is the price they pay for motherhood. Still, while the existence of a motherhood gap appears universal, the degree and duration of its effect on incomes differ across countries.

Latin America is the example par excellence when it comes to analyze the paradox of countries that, despite being quite economically and socially backwards, still appear unexpectedly at the forefront from a political

point of view. In this case, the tormented history of the region has played a crucial role in shaping the context of the gender gap, primarily because of the political instability and inequality that developed as part of the colonization process and the Cold War rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union. More precisely, despite the last 30 years of substantial increase of women in politics in the region, South America remains widely known for its *macho* culture and the arduous battles waged by the *mujeres* in the name of their civil and political rights to fight gendered violence. For this reason, it is important to analyze the concepts of *machismo* and *marianismo* that are able to frame the origins of the myth-cult of male supremacy in the region and the paradoxical coexistence with the phenomenon of *presidentas*.

An even clearer picture of the paradox between the embedded *machismo* and *presidentas* is portrayed by two countries of the region: Argentina and Chile. These two are quite similar, not only for their parallel historical experiences of party politics and military regimes grounded on state terrorism, but also considering that they were both marked by the emergence of new political actors in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, including labor unions and women's organizations (Gray, 2003). Still, despite these similarities, Argentine and Chile experienced a quite different transition from the repressive military regimes into civilian rules, mainly followed by different institutional arrangements (Gray, 2003). However, what really makes them so important when it comes to gender equality is the progress that they were able to reach under the rule of several women leaders. For instance, Eva Duarte de Perón, who is considered as one of the most influential women in South America, and for this reason, has been nominated "spiritual leader" of Argentina, but also Michelle Bachelet, who became the first woman President in Chile and the first elected female leader in South America. Yet, these are just some examples of women that, despite having made history in this continent, still had to fight *machismo* and patriarchy while suffering widespread gender violence. This is exactly where the paradox arises. In other words, the Latin American region struggles with a double role of women: submissive, discriminated against and abused in the home, but, at the same time, possibly endowed with a strong autonomy and independence in the working sphere (Reyes-Housholder & Thoma, 2018).

The academic grounds of my dissertation will be unfolded through three main chapters, aiming at unfurling the paradox of women empowerment and *machismo*. The first chapter provides a theoretical framework of the gender gap, concentrating on its historical developments, and its repercussions in the political and economic domains. The second chapter, being the core of this thesis, focuses on the relationship between women and *machismo* in the political realm of the Latin American region. Finally, Chapter III will portray a more focused analysis of the gender gap on the geographical level, taking into consideration two Latin American countries, namely Argentina and Chile, which can serve as a model to depict more in depth the relationship between *machismo* and gender equality, as well as the phenomenon of *presidentas* in the continent. The last section of this chapter will also draw some conclusions pertaining to the research question of this work, summarizing the main points, and leaving with some remarks on what remains to be done to finally bridge the gap.



## Chapter I: Theoretical framework of the gender gap

*“Gender equality is more than a goal in itself.*

*It is a precondition for meeting the challenge of reducing poverty, promoting sustainable development and building good governance.”*

(Kofi Annan, 1998).

This chapter will analyze the concept of the gender gap, its historical developments, and its implications in the political and economic spheres. The aim is to shed light on the factors contributing to the current situation and helpful for the understanding of the complex dynamics that will be analyzed in the following sections.

### **1.1. An introduction to the concept of gender gap**

The gender gap and its narrowing are undoubtedly one of the greatest advances of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Goldin, 2014). Nowadays, most developed countries guarantee women the same opportunities as men in terms of access to education and the labor market, though a true equality of outcome is still not guaranteed. Albeit women currently play roles and cover tasks that until a few years ago were inaccessible or a male prerogative, it must be said that they are still subject to gender stereotyping, especially in fields like politics.

#### **1.1.1. Historical premise on the context of gender equality**

Gender equality is the idea that all human beings, regardless of their sex or gender identity, are free to develop their personal abilities and make choices without the boundaries set by stereotypes, strict gender roles, or discrimination (Health Communication Capacity Collaborative, 2016). Historically speaking, there hasn't been much continuity regarding the development of feminist and social movements fighting for gender equality. In fact, while there have been some periods characterized by a relative absence of feminist thought and mobilization, there have also been times in which both feminist criticism and activism have had a high public profile.

Generally speaking, the history of the modern western feminist movements is divided into three waves and, although each Feminism has its own perspective, these movements all aim at defining and supporting equal political, economic, and social rights for women (Rampton, 2015). The first wave, which took place between the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup>, dealt mainly with suffrage, working conditions and educational rights. Then, the second wave (1960s-1980s) dealt with the inequality of laws, as well as cultural inequalities and the role of women in society. Finally, the third wave of feminism, which occurred between

the late 1980s and the early 2000s, is regarded as both an extension of the second wave and a response to the perceived failures. Despite the several opinions on this, many claim that the world is currently living in the fourth wave of feminism, which has begun in 2012 and is mainly characterized by an emphasis on women empowerment, including the use of internet means and intersectionality.

Throughout the years, the main cause of the gender gap has seemed to lie in gender stereotypes, which originated from gender roles. For this reason, it is important to understand the historical background. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, more precisely in the Victorian Era, women typically worked in the household while men were the primary breadwinners. So, while women cooked, cleaned, and tended to the kids, men worked all day to come back to a home-cooked meal and most of the times to submissive wives and children (Bryant et al., 2015). The consequences of these well-established rules have been detrimental for a woman's role in society and have limited her participation, giving women no chance neither to vote nor to be represented. In other words, male dominance in decision-making positions was deemed naturally legitimate and undisputable, while, in the family, it was respectively seen as biologically indispensable for the well-functioning of the whole household.

As a consequence, the different waves of feminism tried to address the problems of the time to prevent gender discrimination from enduring. In fact, while the first wave was represented mainly by the women's lobby to access the vote and different professions, as well as the right to own property, in the second wave the motive of the struggle was the female body, and hence, abortion, rape, domestic violence and the sexual division of labor. In the end, the battle against this type of discrimination created conditions within which heterogeneity was possible. Finally, the third wave, also referred to as the "new feminism", has been concerned with new threats to women's rights in the wake of the new global world order, but has also criticized earlier feminist waves for presenting universal answers (Krolokke, 2005).

Gender stereotypes are at the core of the debate when it comes to the political arena. This is the result of the several stereotypical images of leadership associated with masculinity that society has been fed with throughout history. In fact, when idealizing leadership, people usually tend to associate it with the "think leader, think male" model that has been the cause of many invisible barriers for women. The reason behind these barriers lies in the fact that gender stereotypes are oversimplified and overgeneralized beliefs about what men and women should be like and what traits and behaviors are expected of them. As previously mentioned, traditional gender roles lead back to a time when there were clear and, often, unequal rules about how people were supposed to act based on their gender. In other words, males were expected to be strong and aggressive, but not emotional, and, of course, to be passionate about things like sports, for instance. On the other hand, females were expected to be kind and nurturing, emotional and domestic, suggesting they were all supposed to be able to cook and clean.

As times have changed, so have people's expectations about gender roles, however various current events portray how far the so-called glass ceiling still is from being shattered. For instance, in the last decade of last century, news outlets still covered female candidates in a different way, and this was partly because women

were still conceived as atypical candidates. To be more precise, even if in the '90s women were apparently making remarkable progress, as in the case of Janet Reno and Madeleine Albright who became respectively the first woman attorney general and secretary of state in the US, it is undeniably true that this decade was marked by misogynistic stereotypes. In fact, women, despite having gained more power and more senior positions, were continuously criticized by news outlets for their careers, clothes, bodies, and families, resulting to be pure victims of sexism (Yarrow, 2018). However, over the past 25 years, a persistent flow of female candidates has been registered in several countries' elections, including female presidential nominees. At this point, one would think that the increase of women's political representation may lead to fewer and not more gender stereotypes in news coverage, but research has proven the contrary (Van der Pas & Aaldering, 2020). In fact, in various democracies, even characterized by quite high rates of women's representation, it has been shown that gender stereotypes are more prevalent in news coverage of female candidates. Indeed, as it will be thoroughly shown in later sections of this dissertation, the greater attention on masculine stereotypes strengthens the perception that politics is a masculine arena and, accordingly, this leads female candidates to emphasize their masculine qualities over feminine ones to gain more respect as leaders.

### **1.1.2. Gender equality as SDG**

In September 2015, the United Nations (UN) made history when 193 member states unanimously adopted 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that serve as a centerpiece of its post-2015 development agenda. The aims of these goals are several: to reduce poverty in all its forms, to achieve food security, ensure healthy lives as well as inclusive and equitable education, but also to promote sustainable economic growth and to reduce income inequalities within and among countries, just to mention a few.

Gender Equality is the fifth of these 17 goals, through which the UN seeks to empower all women and girls. Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but an essential basis for a peaceful, flourishing, and sustainable world (United Nations, 2021). Women, in fact, represent half the world's population, and thus also half of its potential. However, even if some progress has been achieved throughout the years, for instance more girls are getting their education, fewer of them are forced into early marriages and more and more women are getting elected in parliaments or selected for positions of leadership, it must be said that there are many challenges that still need to be faced. In fact, according to the UN, discriminatory laws and social norms continue to be pervasive, women keep being underrepresented when it comes to political leadership, and 1 in 5 women between the ages of 15 and 49 report suffering physical or sexual violence from their partner within a 12-month period (United Nations, 2021). Indeed, multiple UN Reports have shown that inequalities faced by girls can start right at birth and then persecute them all their lives. In some countries this can also result in higher mortality rates, due to the lack of health care or proper nutrition. Further, the COVID-19 pandemic slowed down the achieved so far. In fact, in addition to the increase of women's unpaid care work and the growing percentage of women in the informal economy, the pandemic has also led to a sharp increase in violence against women and girls, particularly due to the lockdown measures (UN Women, 2020).

Achieving gender equality has the potential to bring about relevant changes in the society. While the full participation of women in labor forces would contribute to higher economic growth, on the other hand the effective participation of women in politics would be beneficial for decision-making in political, economic, and public life (United Nations, 2021). Furthermore, eliminating early and forced marriages, along with all forms of violence against women and girls in the public and private spheres, would be incredibly valuable steps to take towards a world where gender inequality would not represent a concern anymore.

### **1.1.3. The double bind effect**

The political arena is perhaps one of the worst sectors with the lowest levels of gender equality and representation. More precisely, when it comes to career and leadership, and more generally to male dominated areas, as the political one, there is always the tendency to prefer male leaders to female ones. To better understand this point, the trait approach comes in help. The latter, which is one of the main areas of study in psychology used for the understanding of gender stereotypes, suggests that female politicians are stereotyped similarly to women, who are seen as warm and empathetic, and that, for this reason, are believed to be more capable at handling issues like healthcare, whereas their male counterparts are stereotyped as being able to handle more “masculine” issues, such as defense (Bauer, 2019). These perceptions have had several consequences in the political realm, and most of the times they create the image that some female leaders might not have what it takes to be competitive in hyper-masculinized environments. Consequently, it is possible to assert that one of the reasons for the political under-representation of women worldwide is due to the disadvantage caused by feminine stereotypes of female candidates. In fact, women in politics, and especially those in leadership positions, are often the target of a criticism that is more based on their gender rather than their policies.

In addition to this, there is substantial evidence that suggests that women candidates often go out of their way to convey how experienced they are, or for instance they have to pay more attention to their political speeches, especially in terms of style, tone of voice, or the words and subjects chosen. In other words, it is almost like women candidates have to walk this tightrope of not being too feminine where they are stereotyped as being ineffective, but also not being stereotyped as too masculine, to avoid being perceived as of bad character. This mechanism goes under the name of “double bind effect”<sup>1</sup>. According to the latter, women are successful

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<sup>1</sup> This theory, which essentially describes a dilemma in communication, was firstly introduced by the anthropologist and social scientist Gregory Bateson and his colleagues in the 1950s with respect to the geneses of schizophrenia and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and will be used only afterwards in relation to gender stereotypes. More precisely, the American professor Kathleen Hall Jamieson was one of the first in developing the double bind effect with regard to gender stereotypes, through 5 consolidated points:

1. for women it is impossible to use her brain and her uterus at the same time and, therefore, they must necessarily choose one of the two;
2. women who talk are considered inappropriate, while silent women are ignored;
3. women who are too feminine are considered incompetent, while competent ones are not very feminine;
4. with age, men acquire wisdom and power, while - on the contrary - women become superfluous and old;

leaders when they are able to have a so-called “be-polar” attitude. Hence, when female candidates try to enact authoritative and commanding traits -- which tend to be the characteristics associated with idealized images of masculinity – they are likely to be respected for that, but not necessarily liked; whereas if they take up a more stereotypically female role of being – more nurturing and caretaking -- they may be liked, but not necessarily respected (Bauer, 2019).

As a consequence, both female and male politicians, when running for office, take advantage of campaign ads, speeches, and rallies to persuade voters to support their candidacies. Yet, what makes the difference is whether they decide to highlight feminine or masculine stereotypes based on the extent to which they believe such stereotypes will provide an electoral advantage. When it comes to traits and stereotypes, it would be unrealistic to state that the alignment between masculine stereotypes and political leadership has no pressure on female candidates, considering that in most cases it actually leads them to emphasize masculine qualities over feminine ones in campaign messages (Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993). Media coverage of political campaigns, especially of female candidates running for office, continues to suggest gender stereotypes. Undeniably, this keeps occurring even though coverage has improved over time and is now shaped by a broader set of relevant factors, such as partisanship. However, despite the incredible surge of women across countries during the last elections, especially in the US, the political reporting was wildly skewed, meaning that their coverage was significantly lower, for instance in terms of the numbers of hours of discussion about female candidates, and, when they were covered, it was often in negative terms (Garrett, 2019).

#### **1.1.4. From the glass ceiling to glass cliff**

In 1978, the American writer and diversity advocate Marilyn Loden coined the infamous phrase “glass ceiling” during one of her speeches. Through this expression, she wanted to define in some way this invisible, yet tangible, barrier that averts women from moving to the apex of hierarchy. In other words, the glass ceiling represents this seemingly impossible to break through barrier that sits above the heads of women and stops them from reaching the absolute pinnacles of their capabilities. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that some achievements have been made, especially in Nordic countries, as it will be thoroughly depicted in later sections.

In response to the glass ceiling a new concept has been developed: the glass cliff. The latter, as a direct response to the glass ceiling, argues that women are offered leadership positions when things are going poorly. In other words, when women manage to break through the glass ceiling, they find themselves in a new dangerous position, or better, they find themselves teetering on the edge of a glass cliff. Studies show that in times of crisis it is women who are put in charge and the same research suggests that many men remain skeptical of women’s leadership abilities, leading to the cognitive shortcut “think leader, think male”, which, however, in

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5. women are subjugated when they declare themselves equal or different from men (Jamieson, 1195).

times of poor performance is replaced by the “think crisis, think female” one (Ryan et al., 2011) (Haslam & Ryan, 2008). Therefore, this had led to think that women can actually break through glass ceilings only to face situations with high risks of failure, and this is precisely what the glass cliff concept stands for. A case in point is Christine Lagarde, who became the European Central Bank President and, almost immediately after, found herself facing mounting challenges as she balances the various different competing demands between the Commission, the Parliament and the Council, or even Theresa May, who became Prime Minister in the wake of the Brexit referendum. In other words, there have been numerous cases in which women have only been given the opportunity to lead glass cliff-type situation, where the probability for failure is extraordinarily high and it is heroism that enables success, representing a loss of opportunity to see the real value of female leadership. In fact, considering that historically speaking there has not been much space for female leaders to emerge, it has been proven that women are willing to take charge in much riskier situation, if that is the only chance they have to prove their worth. However, since they are put in much precarious positions with higher likelihood of failure, the result is that there is a far greater risk for them to fall off this glass cliff.

On the whole, it is possible to assert that even if there are many different views on the narrowing of the gender gap, especially in the political arena, this glass ceiling is getting more and more cracks. In fact, on the 20<sup>th</sup> of January 2021, Kamala Harris became the first woman and first woman of color to hold the United States’ second highest office, followed one week later by the appointment of Roz Brewer as new CEO of Walgreens Boots Alliance, a large US’s drugstore, making her one of the only two black women CEOs of Fortune 500 companies. Nevertheless, even though female involvement in politics has exponentially risen in the modern era, there is still a gender gap in political ambition. In fact, even if some women have made it to the very top, they remain the exception, since most do not get that far because of the prejudice and discrimination they still experience at national, regional, and local level (NW et al., 2015).

## **1.2. The Global Gender Gap Index**

The Global Gender Gap Index has the aim of measuring gender equality across the world and was firstly published in 2006 by the World Economic Forum (WEF). More precisely, this index is meant to “measure gender-based gaps in access to resources and opportunities in countries rather than the actual level of the available resources and opportunities in those countries” (World Economic Forum, 2018, para 1.) The reason for this approach lies in the need to dissociate the Index from the countries’ levels of development and to ensure that the ranking depends on their gender gaps, not their development level. According to the Global Gender Gap Report of 2017, the integration of women, in a world that shifts from capitalism into an era of talentism, is of crucial importance considering that competitiveness on a national and international level strongly depends on the innovative ability of a country or a company. Hence, in order to build dynamic and inclusive economies, it is necessary to ensure equal opportunity for everyone and this is precisely what the Global Gender Gap Index attempts to address in its reports every year.

### **1.2.1. Global Gender Gap Report: 2021 insight**

As abovementioned, the Global Gender Gap reports the situation year by year, analyzing the different aspects and factors that cause changes and alterations in the index. In the report of last year, the major impact was given by the COVID-19 pandemic that has elevated new barriers to developing inclusive and flourishing economies and societies. Different sources indicate that the COVID emergency and the correlated economic slump have affected women more severely than men, causing the re-opening of gaps that had already been closed, even if to a partial extent (Profeta, 2021) (Alon et al., 2020). More specifically, the hardest hit sectors by lockdowns and rapid digitalization are those where women are more frequently employed (World Economic Forum, 2021). Therefore, it is clear that the additional pressures of providing care in the home along with the other factors have paused the progress towards gender equality in various economies and industries. A further result has been the acceleration of automation and digitalization that has speeded up the process of disruption of the labor market, which, as different sources point out, will be a major challenge for gender equality in the future due to the growing occupational gender-segregation.

Nevertheless, as it often happens with crises, the recovery strategies proposed to avert enduring scarring in the labor market are crucial for the unfreeze of the progress towards gender parity. Hence, it is an unparalleled opportunity for leaders to encourage more robust and gender-equal economies by investing in inclusive workplaces, building more equitable care systems, or enhancing women’s rise to leadership positions (World Economic Forum, 2021). In other words, the post pandemic recovery has the potential of embedding gender quality as a central goal of the future policies and practices that could only result being beneficial both in economic and social terms. These measures are critical to avoid the scarring effect of the pandemic on the future economic opportunities for women, risking inferior re-employment prospects and a persistent drop in income. Thus, it is for the reasons just mentioned that effective mid-career reskilling policies along with

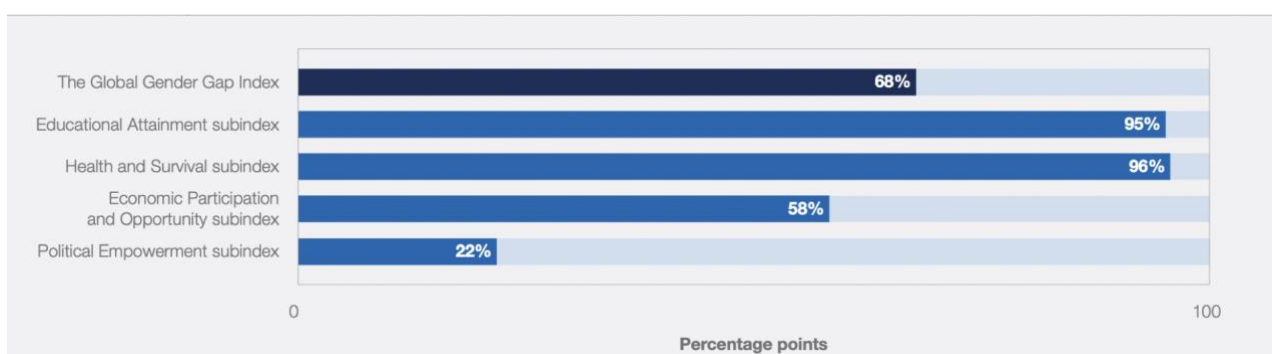
managerial practices, for instance, could be efficient and necessary countermeasures to pave the way for a more gender-equal future in occupations.

In 2021, the Global Gender Gap Index has taken into consideration 156 countries, 107 of which have constantly been included since the first edition of 2006, providing a tool for cross-country comparison, and tracking progress towards closing the gaps in the different dimensions of the index<sup>i</sup>, other than highlighting the policies that have proven to be most effective. In 2021, the country coverage has been extended to three more countries, namely Afghanistan, Guyana, and Niger. The latter countries, in fact, have met the required standards for the first time, meaning that they had recent data available for a minimum of 12 indicators out of the 14 of the Index. As for the methodology of the index, it has remained constant since its original conception in 2006, given that it has demonstrated to be a robust basis for the cross-country analysis. As for the scores, they are measured on a 0 to a 100 scale and can be interpreted as the distance to parity, and thus, the percentage of the gender gap that has been closed. Consequently, the 2021 score, and hence the average distance completed to parity is approximately of 68%, a step back compared to 2020. This percentage is also the result of the overall global gender gap scores across the four main components of the index that are analyzed in the following section.

### 1.2.2. The Global Gender Gap sub-indexes

The Global Gender Gap Index examines the gap between men and women through four fundamental categories: Economic Participation and Opportunity, Educational Attainment, Health and Survival and Political Empowerment. The Index uses these four main components to analyze the various factors that are leading to the overall average decline in the global gender gap score, but also to highlight the progress reached globally in each dimension so far. As mentioned above, the current decline has been caused by a reversal in performance on the Political Empowerment gap. Yet, it must also be said that the progress in Economic Participation and Opportunity, Educational Attainment along with Health and Survival has been marginal, if not stalled (World Economic Forum, 2021).

**Figure 1.** The state of gender gaps, by subindex



Source: World Economic Forum, *Global Gender Gap Index*, 2021.



As portrayed in Figure 1, Educational Attainment (95%) and Health and Survival (96%) gaps are very close to destination. Conversely, the residual gaps have proven difficult to close entirely, considering that their scores have stayed nearly unchanged over the previous editions of the report. To go more in depth, only 58% of the Economic Participation and Opportunity has been closed as of 2021, while Political Empowerment has reached the least progress as of last year at the global level. Furthermore, the latter subindex other than being the worst in percentage points is also the most dispersive, due to the several discrepancies across the countries' performance.

As previously mentioned, the gender gap in Economic Participation and Opportunity (58%) remains the second largest of the four subindexes so far, even if registering a marginal improvement since the 2020 Report. Hence, it will still take another 267.6 years to close (World Economic Forum, 2021), also considering the extensive dispersion of countries' performance that ranges from 18% to 92%. Moreover, the slow progress registered in closing this gap is the consequence of two opposing trends. On one hand, the share of women among skilled professionals keeps increasing, as does progress towards wage parity, even if at a slower pace. On the other hand, overall income inequalities are still partially oriented towards being canceled and there is a constant deficiency of women in leadership positions, suffice it to know that women are currently representing just 27% of all manager positions (World Economic Forum, 2021). Additionally, it must be said that the data available for the 2021 report does not yet entirely expose the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. In fact, projections from some countries confirm that gender gaps in labor force participation are broader since the outburst of the pandemic. Consequently, the economic gender gap may thus be between 1% and 4% wider than reported at the global level.

However, some positive results have also been scored. As for the Educational Attainment category, 95% of the gender gap has been closed globally, and with 37 countries already at parity (World Economic Forum, 2021) it remains the area where gender gaps are smallest averagely. Nevertheless, the remaining fragment of progress is advancing slowly, considering that it will take another 14.2 years to entirely close this gap. As for the Health and Survival sub-index, it is possible to say that 96% of the gap has been closed, registering a slight decline since last year, nevertheless the time to close this gap remains unclear (World Economic Forum, 2021). With this being said, it is clear that for both the Education and Health categories, progress is certainly higher than for the economic and political dimensions globally speaking. Besides, it is important to be prepared for the significant future repercussions of the pandemic, as well as the constant discrepancies in quality across income, geography, race, and ethnicity.

### **1.2.3. Gender inequality: a global perspective**

As of 2021, the Global Gender Gap score is 67.7% and is based on the population-weighted average for each of the 156 countries included, meaning that the remaining gap stands at 32.3%. To be more precise, between 2021 and 2020 the difference is equal to 0.6 in percentage points, mainly due to a decline in the performance of large countries. This small yet current widening of the gap is also the result of the smaller number of

countries registering at least a marginal improvement compared to last year. Therefore, overall, 98 countries have improved their score, while 55 have either retrogressed or stalled. Given the current trajectory, the report's authors suggest that it will take 135.6 years to close the gender gap worldwide.

**Figure 2.** The Global Gender Gap Index 2021 rankings

Rank	Country	Score		Rank change	Score change	
		0-1	0-1	2020	2020	2006
1	Iceland	0,892	0,892	-	+0,016	+0,111
2	Finland	0,861	0,861	1	+0,029	+0,065
3	Norway	0,849	0,849	-1	+0,007	+0,050
4	New Zealand	0,840	0,840	2	+0,041	+0,089
5	Sweden	0,823	0,823	-1	+0,003	+0,009
6	Namibia	0,809	0,809	6	+0,025	+0,122
7	Rwanda	0,805	0,805	2	+0,014	n/a
8	Lithuania	0,804	0,804	25	+0,059	+0,096
9	Ireland	0,800	0,800	-2	+0,002	+0,066
10	Switzerland	0,798	0,798	8	+0,019	+0,098

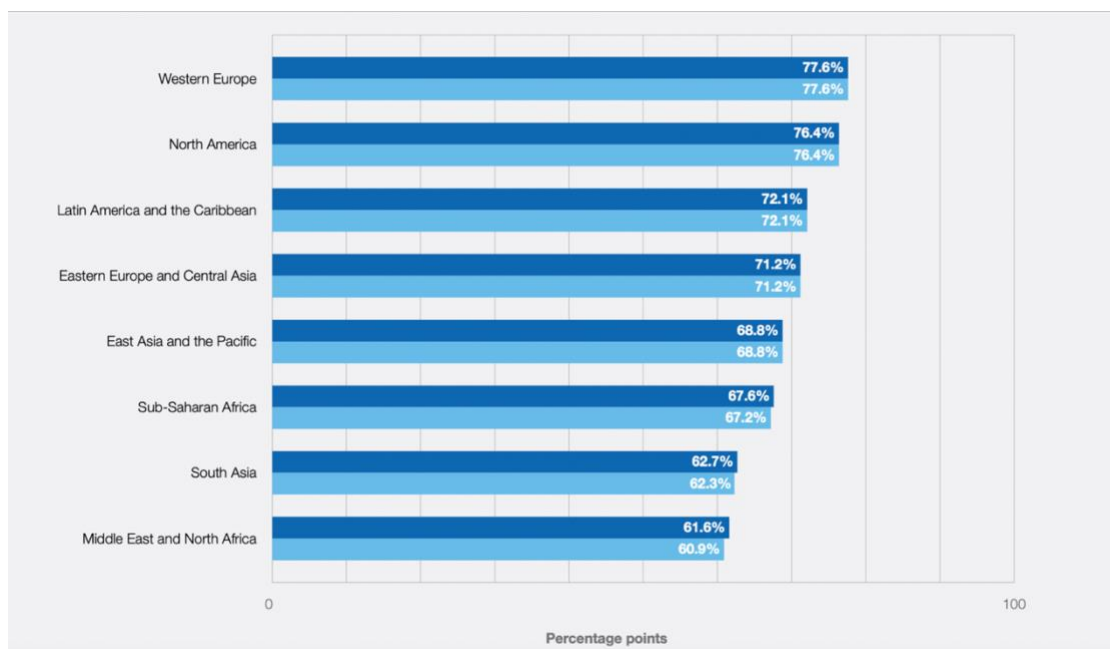
Source: World Economic Forum, *Global Gender Gap Report 2021*, March 2021.

According to Figure 2, in 2021 Iceland classifies as the most gender-equal country in the world for the 12<sup>th</sup> time with a percentage of 89.2%, closely followed by Finland (86.1%), Norway (84.9%), New Zealand (84.0%) and Sweden (82.3%). It is no surprise that Iceland, among the 156 countries, confirms its position on the highest step of the podium, considering the major strides made towards closing the gender gap, especially on the economic level. In this region, the real turning point came in 1975, when women left their workplaces and went out in the streets to object to the gender pay gap. As a result, businesses could not stay open, and this favored a huge grassroots wave that slowly started changing society. Hence, women became a lot more visible in the political field and 1980, five years after the strike, Iceland voted in the world's first democratically elected female president, which in turn allowed a substantial increase of women in Parliament. However, going back to the global analysis, it is important to mention the five most-improved countries in the overall index of 2021, which are Lithuania, Serbia, Timor-Leste, Togo, and United Arab Emirates, having tightened their gender gaps by at least 4.4 % or more. Therefore, it is clear that the global top ten keeps being dominated by Nordic countries, even if Figure 2 shows Namibia and Rwanda respectively ranked 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup>, followed by one country from Eastern Europe (Lithuania) and two Western European countries (Ireland and Switzerland). However, it is important to specify that according to the monthly ranking of women in national parliaments, published by IPU Parline, the first place in the rank is occupied by Rwanda. This country, in fact, after the 2018 elections, counts 61.3% of women in the Lower House and 34.6% in the Upper Chamber (IPU Parline, 2022).

Finally, to track performances by region, the Global Gender Gap Report groups countries into eight comprehensive geographical categories: East Asia and the Pacific; Eastern Europe and Central Asia; Latin

America and the Caribbean; Middle East and North Africa; North America; South Asia; Sub-Saharan Africa; and Western Europe (World Economic Forum, 2021). As it always appears on the reports, also in the 2021 edition there are substantial inequalities across and within various geographies. In fact, progress towards gender equality has moved forward at different levels and speeds across these eight regions.

**Figure 3.** Gender gap closed to date, by region



*Source:* World Economic Forum, *Global Gender Gap Index*, 2021.

As shown in figure 3, Western Europe remains the region to have progressed the most towards gender parity with a percentage of 77.6% and continues to progress by year. Secondly, there is North America (76.4%), also improving according to the 2021 Report, followed by Latin America and the Caribbean (71.2%) and Eastern Europe and Central Asia (71.1%). With a percentage of 68.9, and thus a few decimal points below, there is the East Asia and the Pacific region, just ahead of Sub-Saharan Africa (67.2%) and bettering South Asia (62.3%). Therefore, the area with the largest gap remains the Middle East and North Africa with 60.9%. All in all, it can be said that, at the current pace, gender gaps could be potentially closed in approximately 52.1 years in Western Europe, 61.5 years in North America, and 68.9 years in Latin America and the Caribbean, while in all other regions it will take over 100 years to close the gender gap.

#### **1.2.4. Gender gap in Political Empowerment**

The Global Gender Gap in Political Empowerment, as aforementioned, is one the subindexes of the Global Gender Gap Index and the most crucial one for the aim of this dissertation. This dimension measures the gap between men and women at the highest level of political decision-making through the ratio of women to men in ministerial positions and the ratio of women to men in parliamentary positions, along with the ratio of women to men in terms of years in executive office for the last 50 years (World Economic Forum, 2018). As

previously mentioned, the gender gap in Political Empowerment remains the largest of the four gaps tracked, with only 22% closed to date, having further broadened since the 2020 report by 2.4 percentage points.

**Figure 4.** The Global Gender Gap Index 2021, results by subindex

**Political Empowerment**

Rank	Country	Score (0-1)
1	Iceland	0.760
2	Finland	0.669
3	Norway	0.640
4	New Zealand	0.630
5	Nicaragua	0.606
6	Rwanda	0.563
7	Bangladesh	0.546
8	Costa Rica	0.545
9	Sweden	0.522
10	Germany	0.509

*Source: World Economic Forum, Global Gender Gap Index, 2021.*

Although Political Empowerment has improved by at least 0.1 % in 92 countries, only 22.3% of this gap has been closed so far, and even Iceland has yet to close 24% of this gap (World Economic Forum, 2021). Across the 156 countries analyzed, women represent only 26.1% of about 35,500 parliament seats and solely 22.6% of more than 3,400 ministers at the global level (World Economic Forum, 2021)., suffice it to know that in 9 of the 156 countries analyzed in 2021 there are no female ministers at all. Moreover, as of 15th January 2021, there has never been a woman head of state in 81 countries, including the ones believed to be comparatively progressive with respect to gender parity, notably Sweden, the Netherlands, Spain, and the US (World Economic Forum, 2021). The widening gender gap in Political Participation has been determined by negative trends in several large countries which have compensated progress in another 98 smaller countries. Moreover, at the global level, since the former edition of the report, a rise of women in parliaments has been registered, and two countries have elected their first female prime minister, namely Togo in 2020 and Belgium in 2019. The most improved country in term of gender gap narrowing has been the United Arab Emirates, that has moved from 22.5% to 50% of women in parliament, followed by New Zealand (from 40.8% to 48.3%), Switzerland (from 32.5% to 42.0%), Mali (from 9.5% to 27.3%) and Egypt (from 14.9% to 27.4%). Hence, the global average observes significant progress made in various smaller countries, which albeit impacting fewer women worldwide, hints a slow but enduring cultural change in an increasing number of institutions. Finally, by estimating the narrowing of the gap every year since the first report of 2006, it is possible to calculate how many years it will take to close each dimension of the Global Gender Gap Index. Therefore, in this case, given the present rate of progress, the World Economic Forum approximates that it will take 145.5 years to attain gender equality in the political sphere.

### **1.2.5. The gendered nature of politics**

Research shows that women around the world are still exposed to physical, sexual, economic, and psychological discrimination for choosing to participate in politics, even if to different extents depending on several factors, such as one's country's government, policies, or traditional gender norms (UN Women, 2014). It is common knowledge that women are under-represented in political offices worldwide, and their under-representation increases in more high-ranking positions. For instance, as of 2021, 144 women currently hold seats in the US Congress (26.9%), while 24 women (24%) serve in the US Senate and 27.6% serve in the House of Representatives, and, of course, a woman has yet to win the presidency (CAWP, 2022). Unfortunately, this situation is not unique to the American context because women's under-representation remains also a feature of other Western Democracies, even under the leadership of female prime ministers, as widely portrayed in the previous sections. Therefore, it is important to analyze the causes that have led to the current underrepresentation.

First and foremost, as mentioned in the previous section, it must be said that the cultural assumptions about who women are and how different they are from men influence their candidacies, and so do the cultural and organizational assumptions about what it takes to be a competent leader. Therefore, the stereotypes held about women run counter to the traits associated to the image of a successful leader. For this reason, women -when trying to overcompensate for female stereotypes - are more likely than their male opponents to utilize a merit-based messaging strategy. Moreover, while success and likability are positively correlated for men, they are negatively correlated for women. In other words, women leaders have to trade-off competence for likability, and this highlights once again the perception that voters see female candidates as missing the masculine traits they crave in political leaders, a pressure that male candidates do not face.

Moreover, stereotypes of female and male politicians, of course, have another major consequence: they help shape a voter's opinion when entering the voting booth. In essence, information disseminated to voters through campaigns and candidates can definitely influence the way voters use gender stereotypes to evaluate candidates and then draw their conclusion about issue competencies and candidate ideology (Alexander & Andersen, 1993). Therefore, on one hand voters associate communal issues with female politicians, as in the case of education, health care, and social welfare, and on the other, they link agentic issues, such as national security and foreign affairs, to male politicians. As a result, even in countries where women's emancipation is at an advanced level, there are some positions that remain largely barred to them, such as institutional positions or more generally executive ones which are still covered by men, if not with rare exceptions. As previously said, in fact, one of the main reasons is that feminine and masculine stereotypes are politically consequential. In other words, masculine stereotypes coincide with the expectations voters have for political leaders, while feminine traits conflict with conceptions of political leadership. Thus, even if some feminine attributes, as being honest, fit into the expectations voters hold for political leaders, they still perceive feminine traits as secondary to leadership characteristics, implying the primacy of masculine stereotypes for political leaders.

All things considered, gender stereotypes have been and will continue to be an important area to explore, seeking to understand women's underrepresentation in political offices worldwide, and, without a doubt, the role of liberal feminism will continue to be vital for finally shattering this glass ceiling. Female representation, in decision-making contexts, and specifically in politics, represents a critical but essential element for the validation of long integration processes towards horizontal integration. Therefore, governments are called, through the implementation of adequate policies, to change people's mindsets and traditional gender norms to overcome the greatest barriers in investing in the gender dividend: gender stereotypes.

### **1.3. The economic case for gender equality**

Despite the progress achieved in the last decades, it is common knowledge that the gender gap still exists. Economically speaking, gender inequalities related to workplace and remuneration, fall under the label of the gender pay gap. With regard to the causes, a huge body of research from many countries shows that overt pay discrimination only potentially explains a small part of the gender pay gap. The real problem, in fact, lies in the lack of equal opportunity. For this reason, it is important to understand the historical background that led to the current situation.

#### **1.3.1. Historical premise on the gender wage gap**

Over the years, there have been many feminist movements, and not only, that have fought for equal rights among women and minorities. Even though many of these battles have been won, equal pay in the workplace keeps triggering problems notwithstanding the legislation in place to counter it (Bryant et al., 2015). Many hypotheses have been made to address the causes of this gap. Among them, the most renowned are certainly the different personal and professional characteristics, the preferred hours of work, the potential maternity, as well as lower female education rates, women grouping in traditionally feminine industries, not to mention the fact that in most countries it was perfectly legal to pay women less. However, while it is true that many of these hypotheses have proven to be accurate, it must also be said that discriminatory characteristics, as gender stereotypes or costumer and employer bias, seem to have been the most relevant aspects (Bryant et al., 2015) in the past.

Historically speaking, it was not very long ago that the majority of women did not work outside the home at all. Even in the second half of last century, it was very hard to find a substantial number of women in the workforce. One of the reasons is of course that women were often not as well educated as men. For instance, around 70% of women in the US had menial jobs on factory assembly lines or in offices. This, as previously mentioned, was mainly the result of the persistency of cultural norms and stereotypes about gender roles and aptitudes. For instance, women were believed not to mind the routine nor the repetitive work, also given their high finger dexterity. Overtime, it became clear that also women were entitled to a real pay. However, persecuting a real career was not in the agenda, considering also that discrimination was totally legal, allowing

employers to put out job listings for men only. Nevertheless, the late 1960s were decisive in this regard, because in just a few decades things really started to change. In fact, after the battle cry of the women's liberation movement, for the first time in history, women were outnumbering men in the workplace, meaning that women increased their desire to attain "career and family" in an era that saw them swimming against the tide of generally rising income inequality (Goldin, 2014). Of course, this could happen because many of the factors that were causing the pay gap shrunk; for instance, education rates started rising and gendered beliefs like the fact that women were less intelligent and could not hold power started to go in decay. However, one thing remained the same: motherhood, and with it the maternal penalty in the labor market.

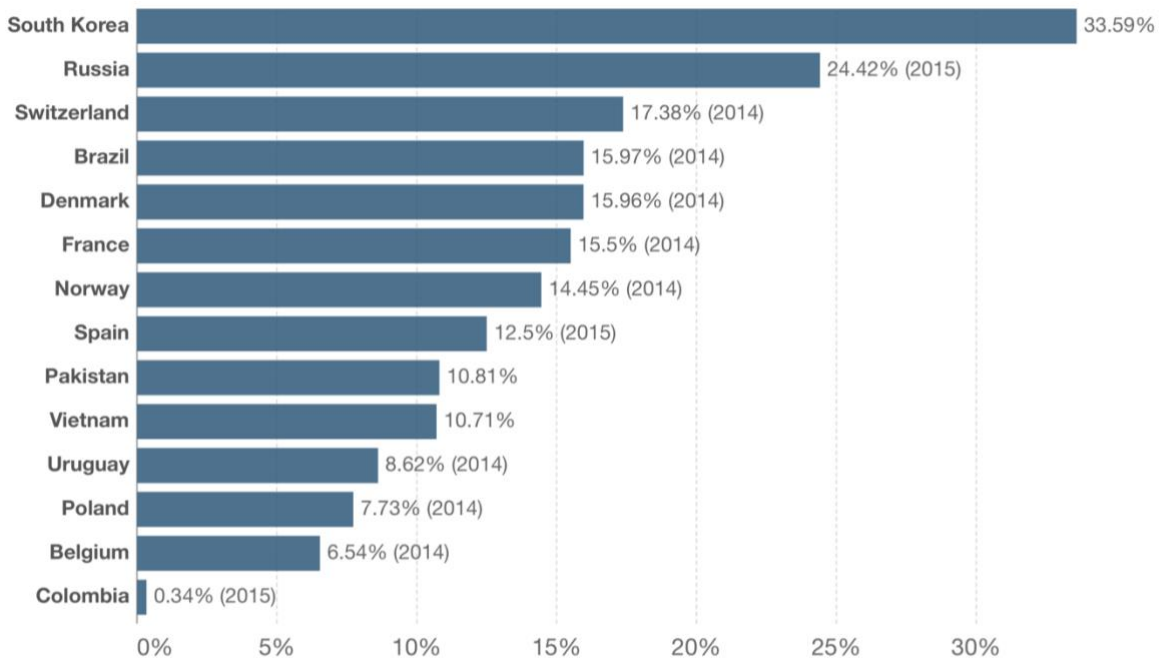
### **1.3.2. The gender pay gap**

Concerning nowadays, many have stated that, among the many improvements in society and the economy in the last century, the converging roles of men and women are one of the greatest. In fact, a contraction has occurred between them in hours of work at home, paid hours of work, labor force participation, life-time labor force experience, occupations, education, and thus, in earnings (Goldin, 2014). More specifically, increasing female labor force participation has been one of the most notable economic developments of last century, which developed as a consequence of the reduction of the time-cost of unpaid care work, shared uniformly with men, and/or made more compatible with market work (Ortiz-Ospina et al., 2018).

According to the Equality and Human Rights Commission, the gender pay gap measures the difference in wage between men and women, and, for this reason, it is a good indicator to assess inequalities in access to work, progression, and rewards. However, as many have avowed, this metric captures a broader concept than that of equal pay for equal work. Generally speaking, there are two sides to the pay gap: "unadjusted" or "raw" and "adjusted". The first is not correlated with the personal or workplace characteristics between men and women, and hence is calculated by comparing all male workers to female ones. The second side is the discriminatory one, and in this case the wage gap is calculated after considering the primary differences in education, experience and so on (Bryant et al., 2015). Therefore, in the economic sphere, contrary to the political one, analyzing differences in pay between men and women is neither essential nor sufficient to prove discrimination in the workplace, proving that the gender pay gap is not an explicit metric of discrimination.

First and foremost, it must be said that in most countries there is a substantial gender pay gap. Secondly, although cross-country data on the gender wage inequality is usually incomplete, the United Nation's International Labor Organization (ILO) offers a fairly accurate evaluation, which will be taken into consideration for the aim of this thesis.

**Figure 5.** Unadjusted gender gap in average hourly wages, 2016



*Source:* ILOSTAT, *Gender Wage Gap (%)*, 1981-2016.

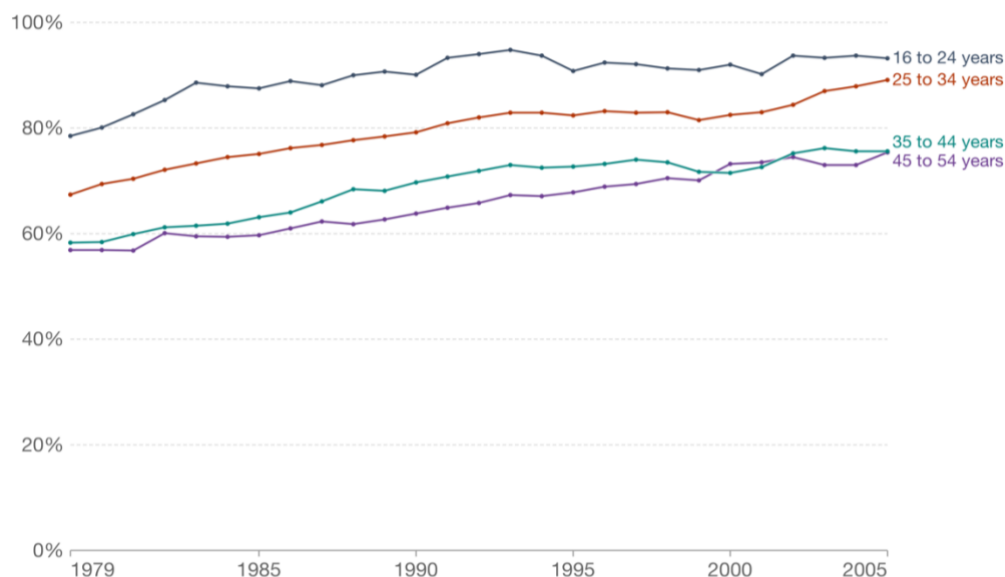
The estimates depicted in Figure 5 illustrate the correspondence to the differences between average hourly earnings of men and women, which are expressed as a percentage of average hourly earnings of men and comprehend all workers regardless of whether they work full time or part time (Ortiz-Ospina et al., 2018). Furthermore, it must be said that this measure can be either positive or negative, implying that if negative it means that men earn averagely less than women, as it happens in some countries like Malaysia. However, Figure 5 helps drawing two main conclusions in this regard: firstly, in most countries, the gap is positive, and secondly, there are large differences in terms of the size of the gap across countries.

As previously maintained, the gender gap has decreased in the last couple of decades in most countries, and in some cases, the narrowing has been remarkable. A case in point is the UK, where the gap fell from 50% to roughly 17% in 2016 (Ortiz-Ospina et al., 2018). However, another aspect that many have observed, is the relationship between the increasing gender pay gap and the desire for time flexibility due to the arrival of children. In other words, the gender gap in earnings greatly expands with age, at least up to some point, and also differs significantly by occupation. This also implies that lower potential earnings, particularly among those with higher-earning spouses, often means lower labor force participation, especially in the corporate, financial, and legal worlds where a flexible schedule often comes at a high price. Thus, while many argue that earning differences for the same position are due to actual discrimination, others believe that women have lesser desire to compete or blame it on the differential employer promotion standards due to gender differences in the probability of leaving. Nonetheless, these alternatives do not explain for example why women without children generally have higher earnings than women with children. For this reason, many economists, among



which Claudia Goldin, who is an American economic historian and labor economist specialized notably on college women's quest for career and family, contends that the gap persists because the hours of work in many occupations are worth more when given at particular moments and when the hours are more continuous.

**Figure 6.** Ratio of female-to-male median earnings by age, US



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, *U.S. Department of Labor*, 2017.

The ratio of female to male median earnings portrayed in Figure 6, as the chart shows, was calculated by taking into consideration the women's weekly earnings as a share of men's, by age group, where earnings ratios are the weekly median earnings of full-time workers in the US (Ortiz-Ospina et al., 2018). Accordingly, there are two main essential conclusions that can be drawn. Firstly, as aforementioned, there has been a clear reduction of the gap in the last decades and, secondly, there are important differences by age. Hence, as the same Goldin has argued, this latter point is crucial in understanding the gender gap, because it is the most influential determinant, especially in rich countries, where the gap tends to increase when women marry and have children. For this reason, in her last chapter of "A Grand Gender Convergence", Goldin avers that pharmacy is an excellent example, among the high-earning occupations, of one that has fairly linear earnings with respect to hours worked and a negligible penalty to time out of the labor force, and to prove her reasoning, she shows that female pharmacists with children often work part-time and remain in the labor force rather than exiting.

Finally, as a consequence, the gender pay gap is smaller in middle-income countries, since in these cases, the labor force participation of women tends to be lower. In fact, as Olivetti and Petrangolo have maintained in one of their articles published on the *Journal of Labor Economics*: "low female employment rates may become consistent with low gender wage gaps simply because low-wage women would not feature in the observed wage distribution" (Olivetti & Petrongolo, 2008, p. 622). Therefore, on balance, it is possible to say that the implementation of measures able to provide an efficient combination of work and family activities for both

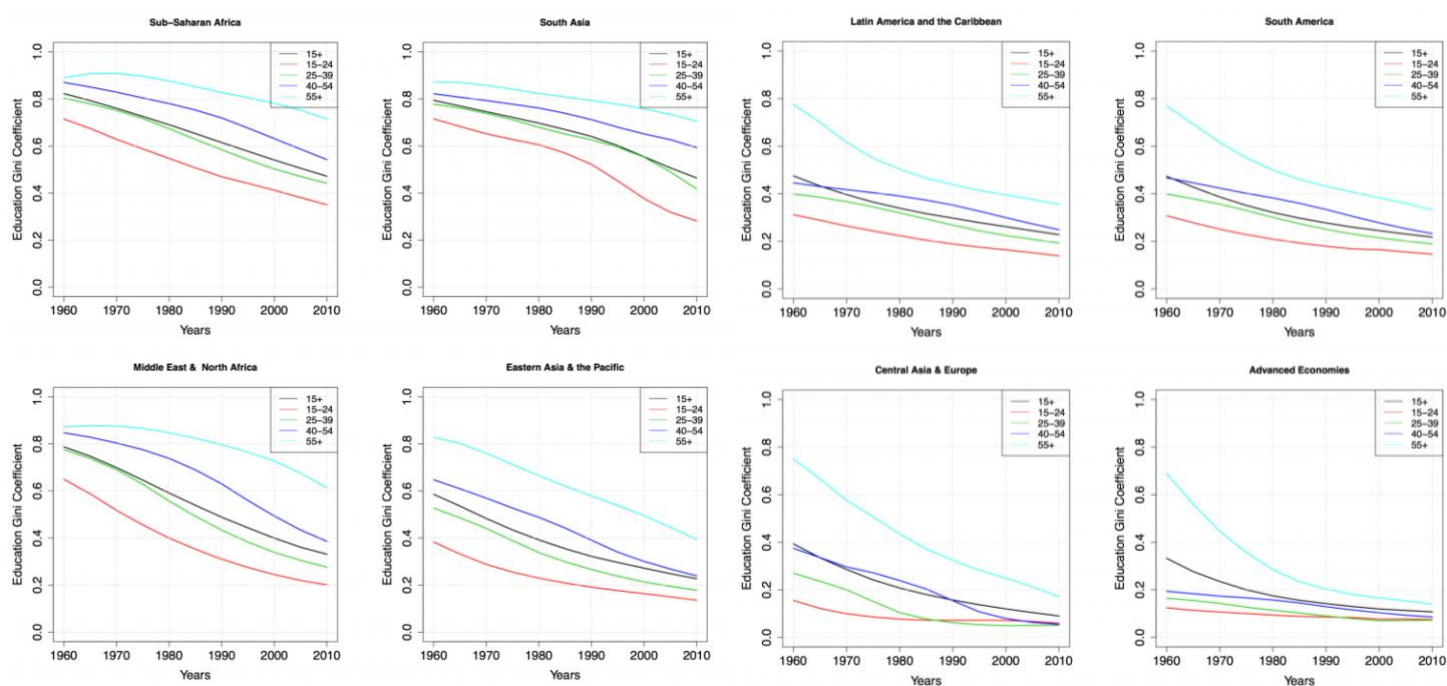
parents through paid parental leaves, early childhood education services or policies that allow a greater flexibility at work are essential tools for the narrowing of the gender pay gap.

### 1.3.3. Gender equality in education

A significant part of the narrowing of the gender pay gap, particularly in rich countries, is often attributable to the reversal of the education gap between men and women that has occurred in the last decades. First of all, education is commonly recognized as a fundamental resource, both for individuals and societies (Roser & Ortiz-Ospina, 2018). Historically speaking, the world has experienced a huge increase in education over the past two centuries, as evident across all kinds of quantity measures. For instance, global literacy rates have been rocketing mainly through growing rates of enrollment in primary education. At the same time, secondary and tertiary education have also drastically grown with a much higher global average years of schooling if compared to a hundred years ago. Nevertheless, as it often happens, some countries have yet to experience such improvements, as the case of sub-Saharan Africa, where there are still literacy rates below 50% among the youth.

When it comes to gender, there are more factors that need to be taken into consideration. First and foremost, following the same line of thought of the previous paragraphs, since inequality has been falling over time, it is clear that the level of education inequality is actually higher for older generations than it is for younger generations (Roser & Ortiz-Ospina, 2018). In addition to this, according to the Education Gini coefficients by world region for selected age groups, in the period 1960-2010, education inequality went down every year, for all age groups and in all world regions (Cuaresma, et al., 2013), as it is shown in the figure below.

**Figure 7.** Education Gini coefficients by world region for selected age groups, 1960- 2010



Source: Crespo Cuaresma et al., *Age-Specific Education Inequality, Education Mobility, and Income Growth*, 2013.

However, although education has played a crucial role in the reduction of the gender pay gap over the years, today it is comparatively unimportant when it comes to explain the remaining gender pay gap in rich countries (Ortiz-Ospina, 2018). Conversely, the jobs' characteristics that women tend to opt for, remain essential contributing factors. Likewise, social norms altering the gender distribution of labor confirm to be central determinants of income inequality. Yet, while many countries have made great progress in narrowing gender gaps in education, new ones are opening. Research, in fact, suggests that many girls across the world still lack confidence in their own abilities compared to boys. However, these problematics should be addressed adequately because when girls and boys can fulfill their potential in school, they can contribute more to the economic growth and well-being of their societies later on. For this reason, despite all the progress achieved and the proportionately smaller remaining gap, education remains a critical element to achieve gender equality, especially in poor countries, where often there is no room for education since girls are usually forced into domestic work and marriage. Therefore, the first step is certainly to educate families about the importance of receiving an education considering that, as it has been thoroughly depicted in the previous sections, good quality education provides more career opportunities, especially for women, as well as promoting economic growth and reducing poverty.

#### **1.3.4. Motherhood and occupational segregation**

Having established that the gender pay gap is not caused by women earning less than men for the same job, then it is clear that the reason is largely based on a different career-path. In other words, while there may be several hypotheses brought up when wondering why women are not moving up the career ladder, it definitely is not a matter of ambition considering that women currently earn the majority of university degrees. What really holds them back, in fact, is the price they pay for motherhood.

Research shows that there is indeed a quite strong correlation between motherhood and occupational segregation, especially with respect to labor force withdrawal (Ishizuka, 2021). By occupational segregation, it is meant the inequality in the distribution of women and men across different occupational categories. The latter usually occurs when women and men tend to overconcentrate in specific sectors or jobs, that in turn start being associated with one gender. For instance, according to the International Labor Organization (ILO), more than half of all women in the world is now employed in the service sector, more specifically education, health, and care work. These jobs are often undervalued and poorly paid as well as generally part-time or in the informal economy. The reason behind choosing a different career path points to motherhood, as the main cause for the remaining gender gap.

Working part-time, in fact, is often the most advantageous opportunity women have to keep working as it facilitates the combination with family obligations, however it commonly comes at a cost to their long-term career and earnings prospects (OECD, 2012). According to the United Nations, for instance, in Denmark while

motherhood explained 40% of the gender gap in income in 1980, in 2017 it justified nearly 80% of the gap (Berniell et al., 2021). Hence, despite the increase of female employment participation over the years, occupational segregation has yet to see remarkable improvements, considering that women keep being under-represented at more senior job levels.

Furthermore, while the arrival of the first child entails a decrease in employment for women and often lower hourly wages for mothers who stay employed, on the other hand, fathers show almost no changes in this respect. Also, this phenomenon opens long-term gender gaps that endure for several years after the birth of the first child. In fact, evidence at the global level shows that the motherhood gap rises as the number of children a woman increases (Budig, 2022). For instance, in several European countries, having one child has a relatively small negative effect, however women with two and remarkably three children undergo a substantial wage penalty.

Furthermore, the effects arisen from motherhood, as one would expect, are larger among less educated women. In fact, especially in developing countries, since women's traditional responsibilities are primarily domestic, either they do not work outside the home or, when they do, they are often part of the informal economy, in lower-paid and less-skilled jobs without opportunities to join unions or trade organizations that advocate for better pay or rights (Health Communication Capacity Collaborative, 2016). Besides, when women do work outside the home, they are still often expected to bear the full burden of household tasks, such as cooking, cleaning, and caring for the children, particularly in countries where social and cultural norms might make men reluctant to take on certain responsibilities that gender norms dictate as outside their domain. Additional evidence indicates that, in many developing countries, the gender of the child may make a difference since daughters might be more prone than sons to help with household and caring tasks, thereby reducing the motherhood gap (Grimshaw & Rubery, 2015).

All things considered, the conclusion often drawn is that mothers are more likely than childless women to be out of labor force, and as a result, they tend to be either over- or under- represented in certain occupations (Hook & Pettit, 2015). However, while the existence of a motherhood gap appears universal, the degree and duration of the effect that motherhood has on incomes differs across countries. What is clear in the end, as concluded in the previous sections, is that the gender gap, more specifically the motherhood wage penalty in this case, obstructs progress towards gender equality in high-, middle-, and low-income countries. In response to this issue, formal childcare support could be quite significant for boosting female employment levels as well as achieving greater gender parity throughout working life (OECD, 2012). Nevertheless, the real answer lies in the capacity of government to apply a gender-responsive approach through public financial management and legal frameworks aiming at removing any obstacles to gender equality.

## Chapter II: Women, *Machismo*, and Politics in Latin America

*“For me, a better democracy is a democracy  
where women do not only have the right to vote and to elect,  
but to be elected.”*

(Michelle Bachelet, 2012).

The second section of this thesis concentrates on the analysis of the gender gap in Latin America, focusing on the political arena, while trying to unfold the paradox of women empowerment and *machismo*. In other words, starting from the historical premises and frameworks on the region, the main focus will be the incongruency between the precarious reality of most women in the region and the relatively high number of elected female presidents.

### 2.1. Context: introduction to the gender gap in Latin America

Historically speaking, Latin America, despite being a region where women endure notoriously high rates of discrimination and harassment, has had some of the highest-ranking female government leaders in the world (Belli, 2016). Therefore, the aim of this chapter is to analyze this paradox and get to its roots to find an answer as to why this region has elected more female presidents than most developed countries in the last decades.

#### 2.1.1. Focusing on a different geographical area

Differently from the Western World, there is scarce literature exploring gender differences in the developing world, especially with regard to politics (Schwindt-Bayer, 2010). Latin American countries are characterized by many similarities when it comes to political systems and sociocultural contexts as in the case of presidential systems, which theoretically divide power among the executive, legislative, and judicial branches, but most of the times concentrate power in the executive where significant social and regional inequalities develop overtime (Franceschet, 2011).

**Figure 8.** The Global Gender Gap Index rankings by region, 2021

### Latin America and the Caribbean

Country	Rank		Score
	Regional	Global	
Nicaragua	1	12	0.796
Costa Rica	2	15	0.786
Barbados	3	27	0.769
Mexico	4	34	0.757
Argentina	5	35	0.752
Trinidad and Tobago	6	37	0.749
Cuba	7	39	0.746
Jamaica	8	40	0.741
Ecuador	9	42	0.739
El Salvador	10	43	0.738
Panama	11	44	0.737
Suriname	12	51	0.729
Guyana*	13	53	0.728
Bahamas	14	58	0.725
Colombia	15	59	0.725
Bolivia	16	61	0.722
Peru	17	62	0.721
Honduras	18	67	0.716
Chile	19	70	0.716
Uruguay	20	85	0.702
Paraguay	21	86	0.702
Dominican Republic	22	89	0.699
Belize	23	90	0.699
Venezuela	24	91	0.699
Brazil	25	93	0.695
Guatemala	26	122	0.655

*Source:* World Economic Forum, *Global Gender Gap Index*, 2021.

According to the Global Gender Gap Report of 2021, the population-weighted regional score of Latin America and the Caribbean is 72.1%, remaining stable from 2020 (World Economic Forum, 2021). Therefore, as portrayed also in Figure 8, it will take this region 68.9 years to close the remaining 28.9% of the gap. Across the countries in the region, Nicaragua classifies as first with a percentage of 79.6 while Guatemala remains the lowest in the rank (65.5%). However, over the 25 countries, 15 of them have improved their general performance, while 10 have actually worsened since 2020. When it comes to examining the most improved overall score, a case in point is certainly El Salvador, which has reduced its gap by 3.2 percentage points in just one year, reaching the 43<sup>rd</sup> spot in the global rank thanks to the remarkable process of integration of women among senior officials and ministers (World Economic Forum, 2021).

With regard to the sub-dimensions of the Index, Educational Attainment (99.7%) has approximately been completed across all 25 countries taken into consideration, however Guatemala still remains the one with the largest gap. When it comes to Health and Survival conditions, the majority of countries concedes equal settings

for men and women, but the lowest performer in this case results to be Bolivia (96.2%). With respect to the Economic Participation and Opportunity sub-index, the average score is 64.2%, remaining quite stable over the last few years (World Economic Forum, 2021). As a consequence, it is important to take into consideration the wide disparities in labor force participation that averagely speaking stands at 59%, reaching its lowest peak in Mexico with a percentage of 49.1 %. Moreover, concerning income inequalities, the situation remains quite similar to the labor force participation, except for Barbados where women's and men's wages are somewhat parallel.

While in the abovementioned sub-dimensions the situation is quite analogous, it must be brought to attention that the story changes when it comes to women being in senior positions. Bolivia, for instance, has the largest gap in these terms with a percentage of merely 29.2 % of women as senior professionals. On the other hand, there are five countries that register almost a score of 100% on this indicator and they are: Belize, Jamaica, Honduras, Bahamas, and Colombia (World Economic Forum, 2021). Similarly, the Political Empowerment sub-index presents mixed results. As it may be recalled from Chapter I, two of the 25 countries of the region here taken into consideration classify 5<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> at the global level, them being respectively Nicaragua and Costa Rica. However, despite this great achievement, Latin America remains one of the regions of the bottom 20 countries in terms of Political Empowerment, remarkably Bahamas which ranks as 146<sup>th</sup>. Certainly, the picture becomes clearer when taking into account the percentage of women in parliaments and ministers across the countries. In fact, while in countries like Cuba, Mexico, and Argentina, at least 40% of the lower-house seats are occupied by women, in Brazil and Paraguay, for instance, it comes down to a 15%, if not less (World Economic Forum, 2021).

### **2.1.2. Historical framework of Latin America**

The history of Latin America has been quite tormented, mainly because of the political instability and inequality that developed as part of the colonization process. For this reason, the region has been used as a testing ground for theories on democratization and political regimes, for decades (Goenaga, 2016). Nowadays, the majority of countries in the region has established democratic institutions, therefore a return to authoritarianism in all respects is quite far-fetched. Still, these regimes are often afoul of the electoral, constitutional, representative, and liberal features that are associated to democratic regimes (Goenaga, 2016). The idea of Latin America begins with the arrival of the Europeans to the Americas. More precisely, with the arrival of Columbus in the Caribbeans in 1492 and Pedro Alvares Cabral in Brazil in 1500, who, in a few years, set out to slave the indigenous population. Consequently, they were able to exploit the resources of the new lands and, by 1520, not only they controlled most of the Caribbean, but the local tribes were already nearly wiped out as ill treatment from the European diseases decimated their numbers. Therefore, for 300 years the Spanish and Portuguese fought off European competitors, crushed resistance from the indigenous, enslaved population and maintained a close hierarchical society (Kittleson & Bushnell, 2019).



Over the years, more and more parts of the region started to claim their independence and in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Latin America began to diverge economically from the United States and Canada. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was even clearer that even though Latin America started to grow again, it was still running behind, compared to the rest of the world. The main reason for the deviation laid in the political disagreements that led not only to a fragmentation, which in turn resulted into smaller weaker countries, but also in civil wars that created massive political instability (Rojas Castro, 2013). During this period, the uncertainty and instability was usually only solved through the appearances of *Caudillos* that dominated countries through personal loyalty rather than institutions. Classic examples in this regard include Juan Manuel de Rosas in Argentina, Antonio Lopez Rodriguez de France in Paraguay, and Jose Antonio Paz in Venezuela (Kittleson & Bushnell, 2019). The exceptions to this general pattern, notably Chile and Costa Rica, would be, not coincidentally the countries that would end up as the richer and more stable democracies in the region. On the other hand, Brazil, despite enjoying stability for the better part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, had its own vision of *Caudillos* which were called *Coroneis* and were the local power brokers that would end up being central to the clientelist system that would develop after the end of the monarchy in 1889 (Rojas Castro, 2013).

Although by the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century mainly Liberals dominated the entire region and ruled either through dictators as in the case of Guatemala, Mexico and Venezuela, or most commonly oligarchies, as in the case of Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, El Salvador or Peru, efforts to integrate the masses were limited, and for the most part depended almost entirely on export-led growth, often in labor-intensive industries that benefited mostly the elite (Karl, 1990). Nevertheless, the pent-up demands could not be ignored, and the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw these coming to the lead in various guises. In fact, there were revolutions and attempted revolutions, such as the Mexican revolution of 1910, which was a bottom-up social explosion that directly shaped Mexican politics for the following 80 years. Another example is the failed Argentine revolution of 1905, which although unsuccessful, paved the way for secret and universal male suffrage under the Saenz Peña Law of 1912 (Karl, 1990).

Furthermore, it is important to mention the massive general strikes and labor organizations that accelerated after the Great Depression. How these demands were incorporated into the various countries' political systems, whether they were integrated through laws, or different types of political parties, resulted to be fundamental for the future type of the political regime (Rojas Castro, 2013). The great depression crisis, in the subsequent recovery during the 1940s and 1950s, saw many countries in Latin America become democracies, which, even if flawed, still had free and fair elections, and at least some modicum of free expression like in Brazil, Chile, Guatemala (Kittleson & Bushnell, 2019). On the other hand, countries like Mexico and Argentina were more corporate hybrid regimes. At this point, one might argue that Latin America might have proceeded towards a path of deeper democratization, bringing along the countries that were still dictatorships at the time, however, after 1948, there was one major variable that changed its dynamic entirely (Field Jr., 2019), which will be thoroughly analyzed in the next section.



### **2.1.3. Historical premise on the democratization process**

The troubled experience with democracy in Latin America has resulted to be fundamental for the understanding of women's condition. Although this region has improved on many different levels mostly due to the real democratic strides made over the years, it is equally true that nowadays Latin America appears mired in political uncertainty. As mentioned in the previous section, there was a variable that changed the course of history in Latin America, especially in relation to the democratization process, and that is the Cold War rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union (Field Jr., 2019).

During this period, the number one foreign policy for the United States was stopping the spread of communism. As a consequence, for Latin America this meant that most efforts to try to deal with inequality or provide public and social goods became immediately suspect in American eyes (V. Bulmer-Thomas & Dunkerley, 1999). Hence, from the mid 1950s to the 1980s, the US started to actively intervene in the region, that was characterized by a shift from essentially democratically elected governments to military dictatorships, as the US was trying to fight the threat posed by the communist domination in the region (Gareau, 2004). In addition to this, during these years various countries registered a rising oppression of human rights.

After the Cold War, democracy started to reconquer the region in its entirety, except for Cuba (Morlino et al., 2016). However, it soon became evident that many of the democracies that emerged were quite fragile, afflicted to the core by issues as pervasive inequality, violence, impunity, institutional weakness, along with the merging of the public and private spheres. Nonetheless, some progress was made as in the case of free and fair elections, which came to be accepted as the only legitimate way to access power in Latin America. Overall, there was the perception that Latin America was leaving behind a tumultuous political past and, compared to other regions in the developing world, was doing reasonably well, also on the social and economic level (Morlino et al., 2016). However, the region was actually walking the tightrope trying to escape the huge vulnerability that had suffered from centuries. As a consequence, a huge political polarization developed, as seen for instance in the last elections held in Peru, but also in other countries such as Brazil and Argentina, along with an obliteration of party systems including the countries that until very recently had quite stable party systems, as in El Salvador and Chile (Bornschiefer, 2016).

The case of Mexico results to be quite important when trying to shed light on the democratization process in Latin America, due to some broader trends that are applicable to the rest of the region (Wise, 2017). In this regard, it is important to say that over the past few years, there have been growing concerns about Mexico's democratic erosion after what was viewed by many as a successful transition to electoral democracy in the year 2000 (Wise, 2017). According to Denise Dresser, a Mexican scholar and university professor, this successful transition, however, had many caveats including the fact that it did not focus on issues pertaining to inequality or socio-economic rights (Hyryläinen, 2021). This transition, in fact, was rather centered on creating conditions for competitive party rule. Therefore, Mexico, as the other countries of the region, did not take into account the growing level of inequality, the exacerbation of poverty as well as the lack of institutions designed to deal with corruptions. And, as a result, the current president Andrés Manuel López Obrador, as

other leaders in the region, took advantage of this context and created a social movement that was built on the recrimination of elites as well as on the narrative that democracy was not working for the people and had failed to fulfill its commitments to Mexico's permanent underclass.

Still, another factor worth mentioning is the pandemic, considering its impact on the continent. Or better, another major risk in the region has been the manipulation of the pandemic and the abuse of the state of emergency, in order to concentrate political power (Blofield et al.,2020). In fact, among the other things, this crisis has also been challenging political leadership, as some presidents are coming forward as strong, unifying leaders, while others are facing great challenges, in a region where, historically speaking, trust in formal institutions has always been quite low (Blofield et al.,2020).

All things considered, in multiple cases, leaders have taken advantage of the instability of their country to ride the wave of indignation, rancor and legitimate resentment with what was perceived as an elitist form of democracy. Nowadays, the Latin American region still faces many challenges. Among the worst, there certainly are security and inequality (Busso & Messina, 2020). More precisely, crime in recent years has exploded, especially in Venezuela, Mexico, and the surrounding central American countries. On the other hand, inequality remains as the social pyramid inherited from colonial times has not changed much. Therefore, the major demand to sustain democracy in the future is the fulfillment of socio-economic rights together with political rights, especially when it comes to women. Thus, the logic of building a system that is strong in terms of welfare, health, education, and security would be a fundamental step to take towards a full democratization process.

#### **2.1.4. Women rights in Latin America**

Historically speaking, the role of patriarchy has played a crucial role in Latin America, especially in past centuries, when husbands had complete control over their wives (Bergmann & Latin, 1990). As it is also clear in the historical framework established above, women have been marginalized, especially on issues of political and economic importance. However, over the years, especially over the last few decades, the role of women in Latin America has become a central aspect and quite strong force for change.

Being sidelined by society did not stop women from fighting for their rights. In the course of time, in fact, there have been several women who, before even having the right to vote, have protested, launched movements, and wrote publications to make sure that their voices would be heard (Swann, 2020). In 1945, the Chilean Lucila Godoy Alcayaga became the first Latin American woman to win the Nobel Prize for Literature and has also stood out for her fight to ensure that girls could have access to quality education. Another case in point surely is Felisa Rincón de Gautier, who in 1946 became the first female mayor of a capital city in the region and strongly believed in women not only having the right to vote, but also to be active in politics. The activism and work of these two women, along with many others', including the champion of women's rights María Jesús Alvarado Rivera, encouraged the Venezuelan government to promote a new constitution, more in line with most Western Republics, asserting that all citizens, irrespective of gender, have social, political, and economic rights, just to mention an example (Swann, 2020). Moreover, NGOs as well as other international

organizations have been fighting to strengthen female rights in the region involving more and more women to bring about a serious and permanent change.

More precisely, the conquest of political rights for South American women took place in three different periods during the last century. The first took place in the 1930s, in which Ecuador granted women the right to vote in 1929, followed by Uruguay, Puerto Rico, Chile, Brazil, Cuba, Bolivia, and finally El Salvador. The second period, instead, which went from the 1940s to the late 1950s saw women conquering the right to vote in the Dominican Republic, followed in turn by Panama, Guatemala, Venezuela, Argentina, Mexico, Costa Rica, Haiti, Guyana, Colombia, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Peru. Finally, the third phase occurred in the 1960s and interested the last country on the list: Paraguay, that gave voting rights to women only in 1961 (*Chronology of Women's Suffrage in Latin America*, n.d.).

There have been several studies on the South American continent, especially in relation to women and the inequality crisis. A case in point is the one by the Inter America Development Bank that highlights how the hendiadys of women and activism has led to a progressive improvement in the socio-economic condition of Latin American women (Bértola & Williamson, 2017). For instance, according to the latter, at the beginning of the 21st century, the illiteracy rate fell below 10%, being a great achievement if compared to the 40% of the 1950s. However, the gender gap persists, especially in terms of outcome (Bértola & Williamson, 2017). In this sense, Latin America is split in half. On the one hand, nations such as Chile, Bolivia, Honduras, Peru, Nicaragua, and Ecuador have maintained a large gender gap in wages over the years. On the other hand, Argentina, Uruguay, Costa Rica, and Venezuela are experiencing a decrease in income gap. A case in itself is Brazil, marked by large inequalities among the population, despite the many social policies undertaken by the government in recent years. Female political activism seems to have had quite an impact on the Latin American social reality that has seen women fighting for voting, abortion, divorce, employment, and equal pay, despite the strong resistance posed by its male-driven society.

One of the most recent examples took place at the end of 2019, when protests broke out in major Latin American cities. In this occasion, Chileans, Colombians, and Ecuadorans took to the streets of their respective capitals to demand equal treatment, better opportunities for all, and a more level playing field. However, these protests did not appear out of nowhere, they were the explosion of a burning volcano of social unrest that had stayed largely dormant during the first decade of the twenty-first century, characterized by the commodity boom<sup>2</sup> and social progress (Busso & Messina, 2020).

Among the other factors, one of the worst causes for inequality is the disparity in pay and, as evidence suggests, Latin America ranks as one of worst in the world, mainly because women work more for less pay (Busso & Messina, 2020). Even though pay gaps between men and women have narrowed in the past decades, they still exist. More precisely, women earn 87 cents for every dollar earned by men and, predictably, they tend to be

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<sup>2</sup> The 2000s commodity boom was the increase of various physical commodity prices, i.e. chemicals and metals, during the first years of 21st century (2000–2014), after the Great Commodities Depression (1980s -1990s). The boom was mainly due to the rising demand from the emerging markets such as the BRIC countries, particularly China, along with the result of concerns over long-term supply availability (Schwartz and Creswell, 2015).

underrepresented in higher paying and more prestigious occupations. In fact, only a third of the top-paying jobs in business, law, health, computer science, government, and science are held by women, who actually tend to be even more underrepresented in top positions at publicly listed companies (Busso & Messina, *ibidem*). In this regard, many intellectuals as well as policy makers have been concerned with reducing income inequality, which after the commodity boom, will likely worsen once again, especially due to the pandemic (Acevedo et al., 2021).

## **2.2. *Machismo*: Latin America's myth-cult of male supremacy**

Latin America is widely known for its macho culture and the grueling battles waged by the *mujeres* in the name of their civil and political rights. More precisely, when analyzing the role of women, especially in the political realm, one immediately encounters a significant paradox. In fact, Latin America, despite being quite socially and economically backwards, still appears surprisingly at the forefront from a political point of view. Moreover, numerous indicators suggest that this trend is very likely to continue, considering the modernizing trends in voters' preferences, the feminization of the electorate as well as the international commitment toward fostering women's political participation (Buvinic & Vivian, 2004).

### **2.2.1. The origin of *Machismo* and the different interpretations**

Latin American countries, as previously mentioned, are characterized by a profound contradiction. Therefore, analyzing all the factors playing a role in contributing to this paradox is a prerequisite for clarifying the reasons behind it. In fact, when talking about gender issues in Latin America, it is crucial to take into account the key concept of *machismo* in relation to the construction of gender stereotypes, which results to be quite problematic for both men and women.

First and foremost, *machismo* is a very debated term in popular culture and even if it has been the object of many articles and research, there still is uncertainty when it comes to define it. Moreover, the term can actually have different meanings depending on the context, however it is clear that this concept is mostly used to refer distinctively to the Latin American region. According to Abraham Peña-Talamantes, an American professor, *machismo* refers to the conceptualization of men as aggressive, dominant, unemotional, and heterosexual (Peña-Talamantes, 2013). In fact, among the main qualities associated to *machismo*, there are virility, emotional detachment, and control.

Despite the simplicity and clarity of this definition, it remains hard to establish the accurate origins of the term. In this regard, history surely plays a critical role, considering that *machismo* lays its foundation in the upper-class attitudes of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, which were linked to the concepts of honor, power, and shame. Further evidence suggests a strong link to Mexico, as Guttman and Paredes have claimed. More precisely, according to this view, *machismo* refers to a standard of behavior exhibited by men in Mexican culture, especially after the advent of nationalism in the country between the 1930s and 1940s (Arciniega et al., 2008).

In addition to *machismo*, other words were used to refer to the same idea of maleness associated to bravery and strength, such as *hombriismo*. By the 1940s, however, *machismo* started being used also in English print with a racist connotation that pointed at the negative traits of Mexicans and Latin American men in general (Gutmann, 1996). Likewise, it is important to mention that in contemporary history the usage of the term *machismo*, especially in the US, has been employed to classify men depending on their seemingly intrinsic national and racial characteristics (Gutmann, 1996).

In other words, it is possible to say that by macho culture it is meant the pathological and stereotyped exaltation of virility: the cult of strength, aggression, and lack of affection in relationships which can also lead to violence. Therefore, *machismo* also comprehends the attitudinal beliefs that deem it appropriate for women to remain in traditional roles, encouraging male dominance over women (Nuñez et al., 2016). More precisely, *machismo* divides women into two categories. The first sees women merely as sexual beings to be conquered and possessed, while the second sees them as mothers, and thus, as authority figures embodying virtue, grace, and worthiness, also considering the very powerful archetype of the mother in Latin America (Belli, 2016). For instance, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, elected in Argentina in 2017, embodied the widow after the death of her husband, and thus, she exemplified a woman in pain that men are expected to defend and protect (Belli, 2016). On the other hand, Laura Chinchilla, elected in Costa Rica in 2010, suffered the most gender-related attacks, being younger and attractive, and was accepted as president due to the patronage of the previous president Oscar Arias (Belli, 2016). Despite the progress achieved, there is still the tendency to expect some kind of proof of being adequate enough to hold such positions, something that men do not encounter, them being the perpetrators of *machismo* and not the victims.

### **2.2.2. The concept of *Marianismo* and the role of religion**

To portray a clear picture of Latin America, in addition to the concept of *machismo*, there is another idea that arises alongside, and that is *marianismo*. This concept stands as the feminine counterpart of *machismo*, characterized by hyperfeminine behavior along with the idea that women are superior to men on a moral and spiritual level (Guizar-Díaz, 2020). More precisely, *marianismo* is a complex process of building deep-rooted femininity that finds the turning point during the European colonization.

This term derives from the name of the Virgin Mary who, according to the Catholic religion, represents the ultimate symbol of purity and motherhood. However, it is not a religious concept, in fact, it actually refers to the imposition of a precise socio-cultural model of a woman based on immaculateness and submissive sacrifice. Hence, among the qualities characterizing *marianismo* there are subordination, selflessness, and faithfulness to the spouse. Nevertheless, it is equally important to understand the role that religion has had in shaping a significant part of Latin American culture, including beliefs related to gender. In fact, there have been several studies in this regard that prove the existence of a correlation between religious beliefs and opportunities for women, also in the political arena (Alvarez, 1990) (Briggs, 1987).

The idea of *marianismo* takes the name of the cult of the *virgencita*, that in English would translate as young virgin. The latter is a European product that has accompanied the process of cultural colonization, which started in Mexico and then spread throughout the region. *Marianismo*, which concerns the expectation regarding female gender roles, focuses on the emphasis of the role of women as family and home centered. Regarding this, it has been argued that this emphasis also encourages passivity, self-sacrifice, and chastity (Niemann, 2004). In other words, it is clear that a *marianista* orientation portrays women in nurturing roles and advocates respect for patriarchal values (Nuñez et al., 2016). Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that the literature on *marianismo* is quite limited and most of the evidence has focused on the relationship of adherence to traditional gender roles (Nuñez et al., 2016).

Consequently, *marianismo* and *machismo* are two cultural phenomena that represent the basis of genders' construction in the Latin American culture. Despite being representative of different phenomena on a global scale, they actually represent specific socio-cultural characteristics that are untranslatable in other languages. However, as aforementioned, the main link between the two is the strong bond with the European colonization. Most importantly, evidence suggests that both of them are consistently associated with higher levels of negative cognitions and emotions (Nuñez et al., 2016). In other words, the *marianista* expectations of a serving woman who must show obedience to patriarchal power and must be silent to maintain harmony are strictly linked to depression and anxiety. Similarly, the traditional traits of *machismo* concerning the emotional restrictiveness and dominance are related to cynical mistrust of other and interpersonal hostility, proving once again that gender stereotypes can only have detrimental consequences on all sorts of levels, psychological one included (Nuñez et al., 2016).

### **2.2.3. Women in politics and policy in LAC**

The last 30 years have seen a substantial increase of women in politics in Latin America and the Caribbean. The main reasons behind this rise surely lie in the consolidation of democratic institutions, the strong feminist movements, and the robust regional push towards egalitarian legislation. In fact, over the years, Latin America has registered much higher levels of women in politics, if compared to other regions, even beating Western Europe.

Many scholars have pointed out that the military dictatorships from the late '60s through the '80s have played a crucial role in politicizing women. In other words, the wave of dictatorships that characterized the '60s and the '70s, the shortage of growth in the '80s along with the effects of the neoliberal imposition in the '90s have paved the way for the establishment of stable democracies. As a consequence, numerous women's organizations were founded with the aim of extending human and citizens' rights, as in the case of the Mothers of the *Plaza de Mayo*<sup>3</sup> in Argentina. However, despite the election of many women leaders, Latin America is

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<sup>3</sup> The Mothers of the *Plaza de Mayo* is a human rights association founded in Argentina as a response to the National Reorganization Process, which was the military dictatorship of Argentina from 1976 to 1983. The primary goal of this association was finding the *desaparecidos* and then finding the ones at fault for crimes against humanity to support their trial (Arditti, 2002).



still not eradicated from the *machismo* culture that pervades several parts of the region and impedes the growth of feminism (Wiedel, 2016).

As previously mentioned, the increase in women's leadership over the last two decades can be accredited to the region's educational expansion, cultural changes, democratization, and adoption of women-friendly legislation along with affirmative action measures (Buvinic & Vivian, 2004). This rise of Latin American women in the political sphere, especially as heads of governments, has been renamed as the phenomenon of *presidentas*, which started with the appointment of Isabel Martínez de Perón, who replaced her husband Juan Domingo Perón upon his death for two years (1974-1976). After her, almost as a domino effect, there were numerous cases in which women were elected or gained power, becoming part of this phenomenon.

Lidia Gueiler Tejada (1979-1980) led Bolivia until new elections before being removed in a coup, Violeta Barrios de Chamorro (1990-1997), more similarly to Isabel Martínez de Perón, entered politics after the assassination of her husband Pedro Joaquín Chamorro and took over as editor of his newspaper (Female Latin American Presidents, 2016). Then, in 1990, she won the presidential elections of Nicaragua beating Daniel Ortega with a 55% victory. A few years later, she was followed by Rosalía Arteaga Serrano in Ecuador (1997) who was actually interim president for just two days. In 1999, Mireya Elisa Moscoso Rodríguez (1999-2004) became president of Panama and was also in charge of the US handover of the Panama Canal; however, her presidency was hunted by claims of corruption. More recently, in 2006, Michelle Bachelet became the President of Chile, after having been the first woman to hold the post of Chile's Defense Minister. In 2007, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner became president in Argentina, being the second one after Isabel Martínez de Perón. Furthermore, in 2010, Costa Rica saw Laura Chinchilla becoming president after having been vice president under the presidency of Oscar Arias. Finally, in 2011, Dilma Vana Rousseff became president of Brazil, making her the 36<sup>th</sup> president of the country and the first female to ever hold the position in a nation of nearly 200 people (Female Latin American Presidents, 2016).

To mention another case in point, in 2015, María Eugenia Vidal became the first governor of the Buenos Aires province in Argentina with more than 60% of the votes. In this case, contrary to some of the leaders aforementioned, she belongs to a new generation of women in politics considering that she is not related to any powerful politician, as it was the case for numerous women in the past decades. In addition to this, she has brought hope to a significant corrupted bureaucracy structure in the region by establishing herself over consolidated politicians.

Nevertheless, it cannot be ignored that at least one of these women, if not all, had to govern facing *machismo* and patriarchy, both dominant in South American tradition, thus suffering widespread gender violence. This is exactly where the paradox arises. Hence, the Latin American region struggles with this double role of women: submissive, discriminated against and abused in the home, but, at the same time, endowed with a strong autonomy and independence in the working sphere, sometimes holding political positions higher than those of male colleagues, implying that these women, despite being elected, have had to continually face the

gendered expectations generated from men's past dominance of presidential power (Reyes-Housholder & Thoma, 2018).

#### **2.2.4. Latin America's struggle with patriarchy and democracy**

The common denominator of women's struggle in Latin America is patriarchy, which could be defined as that system of social structures and practices in which men create an oppressive gender gap, mainly expressed through violence (Burbano, 2016). The latter, in fact, historically speaking, has been one of the crucial factors in keeping women submissive to the system, preventing them to reach higher positions in society that could empower them. In other words, this concept is usually used to describe the ways that the world is organized through ideas about gender, especially by feminist scholars. According to this idea, men should be in charge while women should follow along and, despite some Latin American democracies and their constitutional structures encourage women to be leaders, patriarchy still acts as a barrier for equal progress.

There are actually a lot of ways through which patriarchy shapes people's lives. Perhaps, one of the clearest examples resides in the idea of family or of a marriage. In fact, the word patriarchy derives from *pater*, which means father, who, in a patriarchal family, is hierarchically at the top, being the one in charge. Similarly, a patriarchal government would look the same way, since it would see men taking the lead and women following along.

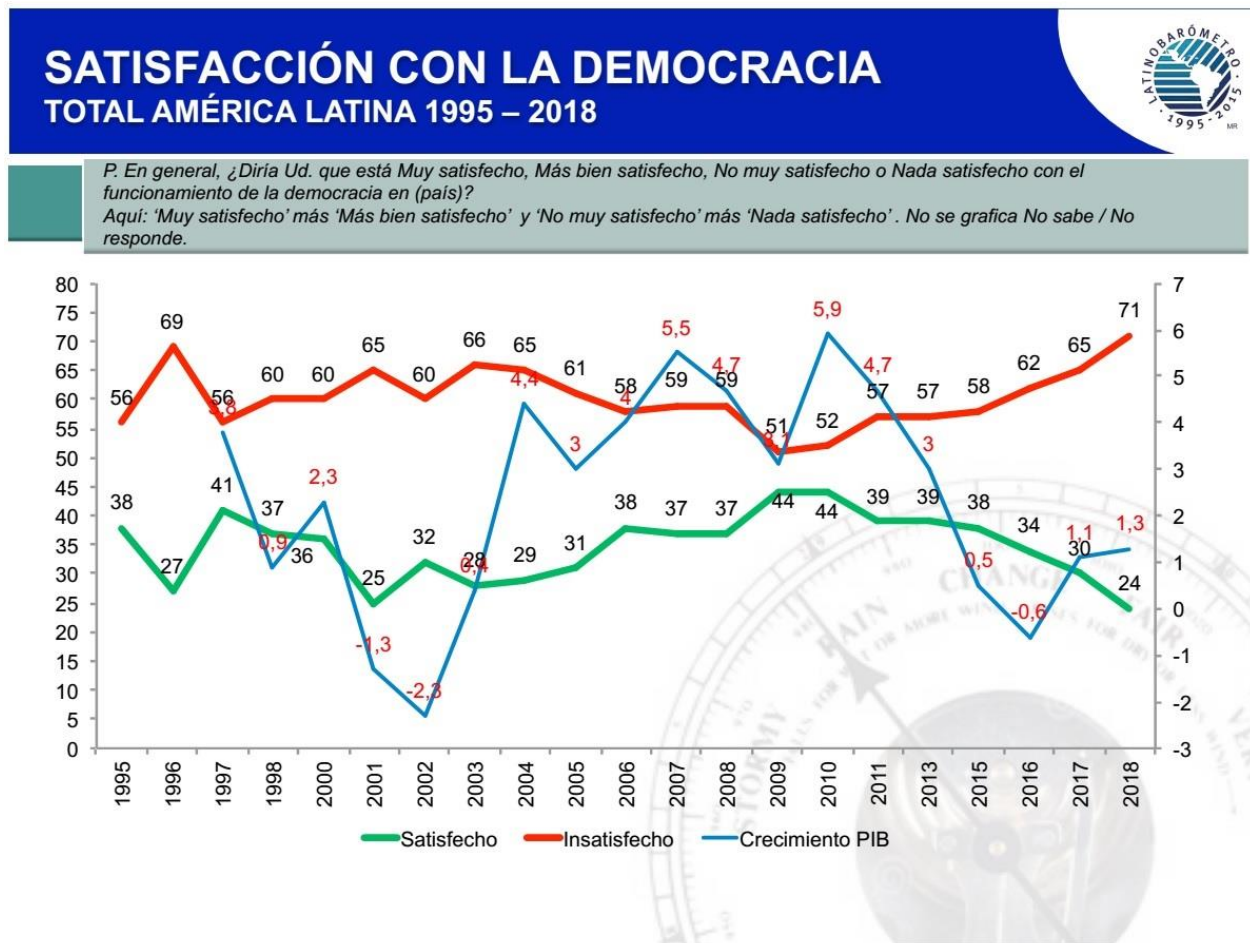
As mentioned in the previous paragraphs, the pandemic in Latin America has had tremendous consequences (Mineo, 2021). According to the Harvard professor Aisha Holland, there are two main factors that have played a part in the high mortality rate in the region during the COVID-19 pandemic. First of all, South America has a long history of suffering high rates of economic inequality and a large informal economy (Mineo, 2021). As a consequence, despite many governments implemented strong quarantine policies, it did not necessarily mean that people could follow the regulations, considering that, especially for informal jobs, people needed to leave the house to work and survive (Mineo, 2021), contributing to the spread of the virus. Secondly, the health systems across Latin America suffered from a serious lack of both human and technical resources to really fight the pandemic (Mineo, 2021).

Despite the detrimental consequences on the health and economic sector that the pandemic has entailed, the political arena suffered as well, particularly from the lack of women leaders during such an age. While in 2014, the region counted four female presidents at the same time, as of 2021 there were no female presidents. However, the real issue, as stated by Cindy Gallop and Tomás Chamorro-Premuzic, was not really the lack of competent females, but rather the too few obstacles for the incompetent male leaders (Rubio, 2021).

In fact, notwithstanding the election of Xiomara Castro as president of Honduras in January 2022, Latin America has had to deal with the lack of female leadership at the highest levels of government, something that cannot be overlooked (Rubio, 2021). Therefore, apart from the pandemic, at this point, it is no coincidence that also dissatisfaction with the quality of democracy in the region has grown over the years, especially after the 1990s, as portrayed in the *Latinobarómetro* of 2018.



Figure 9. Latinobarómetro of 2018.



Source: Corporación Latinobarómetro, *Satisfacción con la democracia*, 2018

According to the figure above, democracy in Latin America is surely experiencing a setback. Among the main reasons behind it, there is a reduction of support for democracy, a general rise in dissatisfaction along with a growth in terms of those indifferent to democracy (Zovatto, 2018). Generally speaking, the level of support for democracy has reached its lowest point since 2001, standing at 48% (Zovatto, 2018). Among the countries with the highest support for democracy, there are Venezuela (75%), Costa Rica (63%), and Uruguay (61%), while the least support was registered in Honduras (34%) along with Guatemala and El Salvador (28%) (Zovatto, 2018). Furthermore, the percentage of those indifferent between a democratic or authoritarian government has reached the 28%, especially among the youth (16-26 years old), becoming an even more serious concern (Zovatto, 2018). Overall, it is possible to say that dissatisfaction with democracy rose to 71%, mainly because of the economic performance, with whom the 84% of the population is dissatisfied (Zovatto, 2018).

### **2.3. The importance of gender quotas**

Throughout modern history, South America has had 12 female presidents. Half of them rose to power under quite extraordinary circumstances and constitutional ruptures (Rubio, 2021) and still do not make up for the number of men presidents elected. As aforementioned, progress toward gender equality is currently slow-moving, notwithstanding the several diversity initiatives. However, there has been one precise tool implemented to combat the perseverance of bias in the system: gender quotas, which organizations and policy makers are increasingly turning to quicken the process (Heath, 2017).

#### **2.3.1. The diffusion of gender quotas**

It is often believed that as societies start developing, the gender gap narrows consequently over time. However, most of the time it is not the case. In fact, despite the global proportion of women parliamentarians stretched to more than 25 % in 2021, being a historic first, parliaments are still quite far from gender parity (UN News, 2021). In other words, while it is true that women now account for more than a quarter of parliamentarians worldwide, it is important to state that these achievements are taking an enormous quantity of time to be achieved. According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), there is a precise element that has backed this progress and that is the implementation of gender quotas.

As stated by the Institute for Gender and the Economy, gender quotas are a hiring tool used by organizations and businesses to increase gender parity. More precisely, there are three main types of gender quotas used in politics: reserved seats, legal candidate quotas and political party quotas (Dahlerup, 2009). The first regulates the number of women elected, while the other two kinds establish a minimum for the share of women on the candidate lists, either as a legal requirement, as in the case of legal candidate quotas, or as a measure included in the statutes of individual political parties, hence, more voluntary (Dahlerup, 2009). In other words, pertaining to the political arena, gender quotas ensure that parliaments truly reflect the population they represent (Turan, 2015). Besides, when a parliament comprises only or largely men, it becomes quite difficult to get wide support for political decisions and to prove that every citizen can be elected (Turan, 2015).

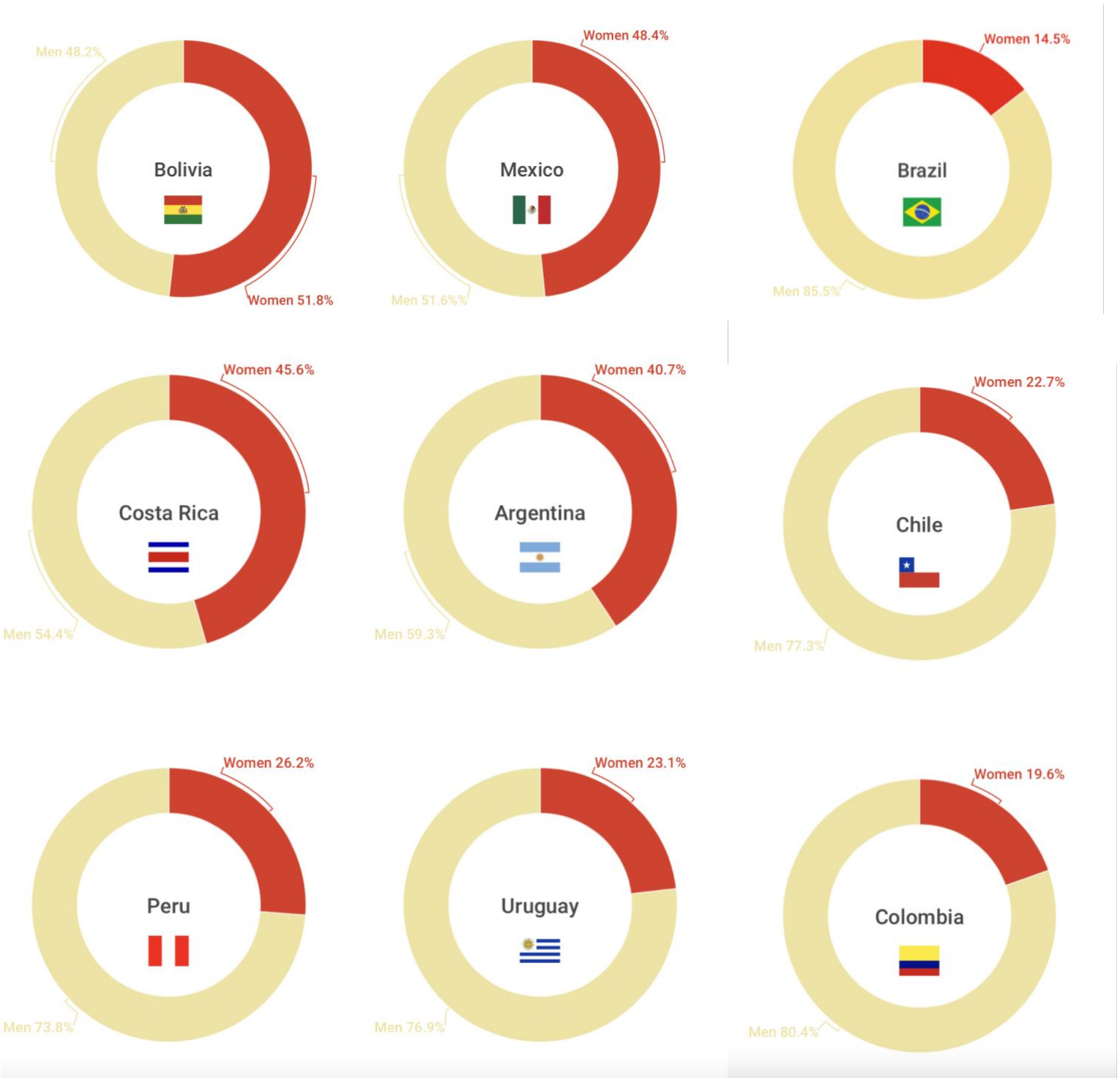
Around the world there have been several governments that have successfully implemented quotas, including Sweden, Germany, Norway, and so on. Generally speaking, in fact, electoral gender quotas were employed in 25 of the 57 countries that had parliamentary renewals in 2020 (UN News, 2021). As a consequence, the IPU has registered that on average, parliaments with quotas elected approximately 12% more women with respect to single and lower chambers and 7.4% more relating to upper chambers (UN News, 2021). However, even if progress was registered across all regions, the Americas classified on top once again in 2020, with women being 32.4% of MPs (UN News, 2021). For instance, in Colombia, Ecuador and Chile the percentage reported was far higher than average (UN News, 2021).

For this reason, Latin America is a clear example of how quotas can considerably improve women's numbers in congress and beyond (Piscopo, 2020). This clear change in parliaments and, generally speaking in politics, dates back to 1991, when Argentine women started to transform electoral politics in South America, and not

only (Piscopo, 2020). Indeed, both feminist activism and the last-minute support from a president looking for a public relations win were the key factor that induced the Argentine Congress to pass the first gender quota law of modern era (Piscopo, 2020). As a consequence, nowadays an increasing number of countries is introducing different types of quotas for public elections. More precisely, according to the Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), half of the countries in the world are implementing some type of electoral quota for their parliaments (Dahlerup, 2009). However, the Latin American region remains the first in this regard across all its countries, except for Guatemala and Venezuela (Piscopo, 2020).

As previously mentioned, although Latin America remains in the frontline, it is equally true that this did not happen without a fight (Piscopo, 2020). In fact, after the democratization process of the 1980s, despite women had led several pro-democracy movements, men were the ones who overwhelmingly benefited from the transition, suffice it to know that merely 5% of legislative seats in the first elections were actually won by women (Piscopo, 2020). In other words, throughout the 1990s the percentage of women in lower or unicameral legislatures was quite low, being around 10%, despite the phenomenon of *presidentas*. At that point, women, rather than waiting for gender bias to vanish over time, started to seek quotas to accelerate their access to elected office, making them the main factor responsible for speeding up the process (Piscopo, 2020). Therefore, as figure 10 below widely portrays, the implementation of gender quotas allowed women to hold 30% of the seats in Latin America's lower or single chambers and 28% in the senates (Piscopo, 2020). More precisely, women currently constitute approximately half the legislature in Argentina, Bolivia, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, and Mexico (Piscopo, 2020).

**Figure 10.** Share of Women in Latin America's Congresses



Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union, *Share of Women in Latin America's Congresses*, 2020

Nevertheless, quotas are not enough (Fitzsimons, 2019). In fact, the design of the quotas results to be far more important in the end than the quotas themselves. The first factor that needs to be taken into consideration is the threshold, which must be high, meaning that it should stand at 50%. Secondly, the quotas must match the electoral systems, especially in a region like Latin America where countries use different forms of party-systems (Piscopo, 2020). The third factor is that the electoral laws should have as less loopholes as possible (Piscopo, 2020).

Furthermore, the combination of a strong design and a strong enforcement divides Latin American countries into two groups (Piscopo, 2020). On one hand, there are those implementing gender parity and enforcing the law such as Argentina, Bolivia, Ecuador, or Mexico, which then elect an average of 46% women to their lower or single chamber to congress (Piscopo, 2020). On the other hand, countries with weak or no quotas that elect an average of 22% of women, as it happens in Colombia and Uruguay, for instance (Piscopo, 2020).

On balance, it is clear that Latin America has not eradicated sexism in politics (Piscopo, 2020). In other words, even if the success of quotas is undeniable in the region, there are still some issues that need to be removed from the system. Still, if Latin American countries continue to plan and apply smart quota laws, there are no doubts that far more women will be able to secure a seat at the table (Piscopo, 2020).

### **2.3.2. The other side of gender quotas**

As it should be clear at this point, over the past few decades, gender equality policies have progressively used quotas to endorse women's access to positions of power, especially in the political realm (Revillard, 2020). However, despite they are considered by many as a targeted and effective tool, quotas remain with uncertain additional effects (Revillard, 2020) (Heath, 2017). "Quotas have neither been the disaster many expected, nor the disruptor executives had feared" (The Economist, 2018, Ten years on from Norway's quota for women on corporate boards). In other words, gender quotas, since their first introduction, have always been at the core of the debate for its many facets, or for the changes that they should have brought about, but failed to achieve in the end.

For instance, according to the academic and journalist Derek J Byrne, gender quotas are a male solution to a male issue (Byrne, 2015). The essential problem with gender quotas is that women are nominated for positions for which they are not the best possible candidate purely because of their gender and not due to their capability to truly do their job (Byrne, 2015). Furthermore, another problem that usually arises is that quotas, beyond increasing the share of women, should have a positive effect also on the women that they do not target directly, but most of the times it is not the case (Revillard, 2020). For example, one may assume that these women, once elected, would embrace policies more favorable to women or that in some way could conduct to hire more female applicants. However, quotas are, by definition, merely a numerical share and do not require any peculiar type of behavior (Revillard, 2020). Furthermore, another point that is often considered is that gender quota policies seem to target positions at the top of political and professional hierarchies, meaning that they apply to senior positions, leaving the inequalities at the other stages unaddressed (Revillard, 2020).

Therefore, quotas, being such a controversial measure, present a series of positive and negative aspects. More precisely, they represent two different concepts of equality, or better a turn from one concept to the other (Dahlerup, 2009). The first is the classical liberal notion of equality as equal opportunity and competitive fairness, while the second, which emerged as a result of feminist pressure, is increasing relevance to the idea of "equality of result" (Dahlerup, 2009). According to the latter, actual equal opportunity does not exist merely because of the removal of formal barriers, considering that direct discrimination and several hidden barriers

persist. In other words, these quotas guarantee an equality of result, but they do not ensure an equal treatment, therefore being a mere compensation for the structural barriers that women encounter in the electoral process (Dahlerup, 2009).

As a result, on the one hand, it is possible to say that these quotas try to combat discrimination, compensating for the actual barriers that prevent women from their fair share of political seats. However, at the same time, they may be against the principle of equal opportunity for all, considering that women are given preference over men in this case (Dahlerup, 2009). Still, it is true that quotas entail that there are various women together in a committee or assembly, and this is an important factor when it comes to reduce the stress often faced by the so-called token women (Dahlerup, 2009). Despite this, some have argued their undemocratic nature since voters should be able to decide who to elect (Turan, 2015).

Nevertheless, the historical exclusion of women from the public sphere is a fact and quotas give women the right as citizens to equal representation and the chance to include their experiences in political life. However, at this point, one could say that quotas suggest that politicians are elected because of their gender, and not thanks to their qualifications (Dahlerup, 2009). Yet, as widely explained in the first chapter, phenomena as the double bind effect or the glass ceiling have actually showed that women, despite being as qualified as men, are often downgraded and disparaged in a male-dominated arena.

Finally, quotas certainly are not the solution, but rather a tool to achieve gender parity (Revillard, 2020). Moreover, being solely a tool, they should not be expected to achieve more than just an increase in the share of women (Revillard, 2020) (Turan, 2015). Hence, there have been many doubts on its efficacy and efficiency, also pertaining to the principles of liberal democracy and equal representation. Still, it is evident that many countries have adopted quotas both because of the influence of international recommendation and for the cross-country inspiration that emerged as consequences of feminist activism and women's participation in various organizations (Dahlerup, 2009). Therefore, despite the many debates on the matter, it is a matter of fact that, under certain circumstances, electoral gender quotas can be the ones responsible for significant historical leaps in women's political representation (Dahlerup, 2009).



## **2.4. Gender and Political Violence**

Violence against women in politics is progressively recognized worldwide. However, Latin America remains one of the regions where violence endures as an evolving tactic to deter women's political participation (Krook & Sanín, 2015). Political violence has had many detrimental repercussions, and, historically speaking, has usually seen men being the perpetrators and women the victims with no power (Billaud & Direnberger, 2021).

### **2.4.1. The gendered nature of political violence**

According to the Irish researcher Breen-Smyth, political violence is “aimed at achieving or resisting regime change in established power hierarchies and orders; asserting or resisting supremacy of one form of national identity over another or others; seizing and controlling economic, political or other resources in the form of mineral, key routes; or resistance to any of these forms of violence” (Breen-Smyth, 2016, p. 569). However, a distinction shall be made as there are two different concepts at the intersection of violence, gender, and politics, them being: gender-motivated and gender-differentiated (Bardall, 2018). The first is damage that violates an individual's or groups' political rights based on their gender identity and motivated by a desire to control and repress the victim's rights merely due to its gender (Bardall, 2018). On the other hand, there is the concept of gender differentiation in the manifestations of politically motivated violence, for instance in civil wars, terrorism, or genocide, just to mention a few cases (Bardall, 2018). However, another distinction must be made. In fact, even if many ignore it, there actually is a substantial difference between electoral violence and the political one. While the first comprehends the acts during the electoral periods, the second includes also the violence perpetrated once women accept their political positions (Krook & Sanín, 2015).

The most remarkable differences reside in the kinds of political violence that women experience far more often than men, be it sexual or economic, often in same locations, including domestic walls, and with the same perpetrators involved (Bardall, 2018). In other words, even if none of these factors are exclusive to women, they are undoubtedly more spread among them, mainly due to the fact that they are often not associated with the majority of leading actors in politics, representing a minority (Bardall, 2018). In this regard, it is also important to mention the role played by gender quotas. In fact, despite the growing awareness that these kinds of strategies do not entirely balance the political playing field, such tools can also generate several forms of backlash and resistance to women's political integration that oftentimes emerge as explicit acts of violence or harassment and sexism with the direct aim of excluding them from the political sphere (Krook & Sanín, 2015). This phenomenon has been central in the context of Latin America where journalists, academics, and NGOs have tried to render the problem visible and fight it through a range of tactics to protect women's right to participate and to guarantee the integrity of the electoral process (Krook & Sanín, 2015). In fact, countries across South America provide growing evidence of violence against women in the political realm, revealing, at the same time, a broad range of hypothetical solutions, comprising bills in congress to outlaw these acts (Krook & Sanín, 2015). A case in point in this region is certainly Bolivia, where a long mass campaign climaxed in legal reform in 2012, being ground-breaking in three respects (Krook & Sanín, 2015). First of all,

it was able to name the phenomenon. Secondly, it stressed the psychological aspect of it as well as the physical forms of abuse, and finally it was able to advance legislation in this regard to forbid these conducts (Krook & Sanín, 2015). More precisely, *la violencia política y acoso político hacia las mujeres* is the proper definition of the behaviors that precisely target women as women to abandon the political scenario by forcing them to stand aside as candidates or to quit (Krook & Sanín, 2015).

Despite men and women might be the targets of electoral violence, according to the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), more than 2000 instances of electoral violence were registered in six countries between 2006 and 2010, revealing different patterns in the sorts of violence faced (Krook & Sanín, 2015). Consistent with these data, men were most likely to undergo physical harm, while women were predominantly the victims of intimidation or psychological abuse (Bardall, 2018). However, these data do not capture the acts and threats committed against female candidates, activists, and voters of women as women (Krook & Sanín, 2015).

#### **2.4.2. From psychological to economic violence**

Scholars usually distinguish four types of violence used against women, namely physical, psychological economic and symbolic violence (Krook & Sanín, 2015). Physical violence refers to all the acts disturbing the bodily integrity of a woman (Krook & Sanín, 2015). In Latin America, this kind of violence is quite widespread, especially in the form of assassination. For instance, in 2004, Guadalupe Ávila Salinas, a female candidate for municipal president in Mexico, was shot during a meeting, just to mention one of the several cases (Krook & Sanín, 2015). Then, there is psychological violence, which even if it does not leave visible effects on one's body, it may have such consequences on an individual, and in this case on women, that could be quite detrimental, triggering especially anxiety and depression, along with high levels of stress.

A survey by the Inter-parliamentary union found that psychological violence affects over 80% of women parliamentarians. Moreover, more than 44% of the surveyed women parliamentarians worldwide received threats of death, rape, beatings, or abduction during their terms (IPU, 2018). Notwithstanding the limited evidence on political violence against women, research claims that this tool may be directed especially at women (Krook & Sanín, 2015). Moreover, if physical violence is mostly manifested through assassinations, the psychological one could also be experienced through the so-called character assassination. A case in point in this regard has seen a native councilwoman denouncing corruption in her town in Mexico, only to be threatened herself and deceitfully blamed of being corrupt (Lamas and Maite, 2009).

Another type of abuse is the economic violence, which is being progressively recognized as a form of violence against women (Krook & Sanín, 2015). Economic violence in political acts comprehends those actions looking for control of both the access and behaviors of women in the political arena, by methodically restricting them from entering in the political scene (Krook & Sanín, 2015). In other words, the purpose is to render their job so hard or frustrating that the chances of actually persecuting a political career diminish unprecedently. The main ways through which it can manifest is the lack of financial support that usually means lack of access to



the formal and informal networks that supply campaign funds, just to mention some examples (Sidhu et al., 2007).

With the regard to Latin America, economic violence is hardly named explicitly in the literature on political harassment and violence, however the existing evidence shows that this kind of violence can start manifesting even in the pre-candidate stage (Krook & Sanín, 2015). Suffice it to know that there was a reform in 2008 that required parties to allocate 2% of their public funding to activities reinforcing women's leadership development in Mexico, even if in the end this actually never happened (Krook & Sanín, 2015). In other words, economic violence can actually deny women the financial resources and, hence, the same opportunity, to conduct efficacious campaigns (Krook & Sanín, 2015). Moreover, once women hold political office, they can face further economic challenges, the worst being the denial of salaries and expenses claims, even for more than a year, as it happened in Bolivia (Corz, 2012).

To summarize, violence delineates political institutions and power relations, not simply between opposing ideological groups, but also between the sexes (Bardall, 2018). In recent years, there has been a remarkable scholar attention pertaining to women being victims of political violence and the usual agreement across this literature is that several acts of political violence take place explicitly because the perpetrator aims at averting women from participating in the political life specifically because they are women (Bardall, 2018). Therefore, it is fundamental to understand that the gendered nature of political violence, especially in Latin America, widely characterized by the historical roots of *machismo* and still suffering from the consequences of colonialism but at the same time appearing far ahead than most European countries in terms of women rise in the political realm, sees the democratization process of last century along with the increase of feminist activism and the implementation of gender quotas playing a critical role in this paradox.

## Chapter III: The case of gender equality in Argentina and Chile

*“We need to break cultural barriers that have  
considered women as lesser beings.*

*Policies must be aimed at transforming cultures.”*

(Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, 2015).

In this chapter the analysis of the gender gap is focused on two Latin American countries, namely Argentina and Chile, which can serve as a model to portray in depth the relationship between *machismo* and gender equality, as well as the phenomenon of *presidentas* in the continent.

### 3.1. Argentina

Argentina is a great example of a nation that is widely recognized for the improvements achieved throughout the years towards gender equality (Charm, 2018). However, despite the progress, women are oftentimes still placed second to men in several domains, but especially in the labor market, and for this reason, they haven't stopped fighting for equal education and equal job opportunities (Charm, 2018). More precisely, according to the Global Gender Gap Report of 2021, Argentina classifies 35<sup>th</sup> over the 156 countries taken into consideration in the analysis, with a score of 0.752, knowing that 0.00 is imparity and 1.00 parity (World Economic Forum, 2021). However, to depict a complete picture of the status of women in the country, it is important to start from its historical framework, which will allow then to turn to the analysis of Peronism and the more recent election of Cristina Fernández de Kirchner.

#### 3.1.1. Historical framework of Argentina

Argentina covers most of the southern portion of Latin America, ranking as one of the continent's largest economies (World Bank, 2018). Over the years, Argentina has also committed to sustain active policies for social inclusion, seeking to break cultural barriers and aiming to empower women, not only as a matter of obligation under international conventions or treaties (UN Women, 2019). Nevertheless, the country's history remains a fundamental concept to analyze in order to understand in depth the status of women.

Before being colonized, Argentina was part of the Inca Empire that lasted for about half a century and ended with the arrival of the Spanish, who a few decades later established the Viceroyalty of the *Rio de la Plata* (Omodeo, 2020). In 1776 this Viceroyalty consisted of today's Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay and to some extent also the Bolivian territory, however it was short-lived due to the lack of internal cohesion among its many regions and the lack of Spanish support (Omodeo, 2020). Afterwards, in 1806 and 1807, the British invaded Buenos Aires and Montevideo, but were defeated on both occasions (Verdo & Krieger, 2014).

A few years later, the May Revolution of 1810 took place, and as a result, the Viceroyalty was renamed, becoming the United Provinces of *Rio de la Plata* (Criscenti, 1961). At this point, revolutionaries split into two antagonist groups: the Centralists and the Federalists, this being a move that would define Argentina's first decades of independence (Criscenti, 1961). In fact, in 1816 the Declaration of Independence was formalized, and still is celebrated to this day. However, other battles were fought between the Centralists and Federalists, and this resulted in the end of the Supreme Director Rule and in the appointment of the first president of the country Bernardino Rivadavia (Criscenti, 1961). Nevertheless, the interior provinces soon rose against him, forced his resignation, and discarded the constitution (Criscenti, 1961).

Later, in 1835, general Juan Manuel de Rosas became dictator of Argentina (Shumway, 2013). The latter, despite being a federalist, introduced a strong central government, however a rebellion later removed him from power (Shumway, 2013). He was followed by Justo José de Urquiza who immediately began the task of national organization, becoming provisional director of the Argentine Confederation. Therefore, till the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the natives of Southern Argentina lived in their traditional way, up until general Julio Rica led an army to conquer them (Verdo & Krieger, 2014). At this point, the Argentine population, driven by the immigration wave and the decreasing mortality, boomed and the economy grew dramatically (Criscenti, 1961). Accordingly, in 1865, Argentina became one of the top 25 nations by per capital income (Shumway, 2013). During World War I, the country stayed neutral, however, a few years later, still faced a quite serious economic crisis precipitated by the Great Depression. As a result, in 1938 Hipolito Yrigoyen was ousted from power by the military led by José Félix Uriburu (Goldwert, 1968). Although Argentina remained among the 15 richest countries until the midcentury, this coup d'état marks the start of the steady economic and social decline that pushed the country back into underdevelopment (Goldwert, 1968). As during WWI, Argentina initially stayed neutral during the Second World War, mainly driven by the fear of the spread of communism, a decision that had full British support but was rejected by the US after the attack on Pearl Harbor (Goldwert, 1968). However, a new military coup toppled the government in Argentina, and war was declared against the Axis powers a month before the end of WWII (Goldwert, 1968).

After the coup of 1943, Juan Domingo Peron gradually emerged as a leader and three years later he was elected president (Spruk, 2019). During his years of power, he introduced several welfare measures and nationalized industries. However, after his appointment, Argentina broke diplomatic relations with the Axis' powers, and thus, after the advent of the so-called Revolution of Liberation he was forced to flee abroad (Spruk, 2019). In the next few decades, the country was marked by frequent coup d'états and low economic growth (Spruk, 2019). Furthermore, between the 1970s and 1990s, the Dirty War took place, involving state terrorism and the disappearance of thousands of people (Spruk, 2019). In the meanwhile, inflation continued to rage, and Argentina became heavily indebted (Spruk, 2019). President Raul Alfonsin was unable to solve the problem of hyperinflation and so handed over power to his successor Carlos Saul Menem, who, during the 1990s, attempted to curb inflation along with privatizing industry (Goldwert, 1968).

With this being said, it is clear that Argentina is a prominent regional power in the Latin American region. However, it is equally true that the status of Argentina as a semi-developed country persisted up until the eve of the First World War, after which the country quickly ended up being rather underdeveloped (Spruk, 2019). This was the result of the several institutional breakdowns that obliged the country to spend most of its resources fighting against the quite high political instability that has permanently marked its history (Spruk, 2019). In other words, Argentina, after having taken off during the *Belle Époque*, had to face the subsequent transition to being an underdeveloped country mainly due to the lack of broad-based *de jure* and *de facto* political institutions that in turn created the conditions for economic stagnation, which can be quite difficult to overcome notwithstanding the quality of policymaking (Spruk, 2019).

### **3.1.2. The status of women in the Argentinian society**

After the return of democracy in 1954, the status of women in Argentina has varied considerably, reaching a fairly high level of gender equality, as also portrayed in the Global Gender Gap Report aforementioned. In fact, the country entered the new century with a far more promising legal framework for women's human rights, leaving behind the tragic military dictatorships of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that dreadfully marked its progress (Ocampo, 2003). Still, despite the fairly high achievements reached throughout the years, also in comparison to other Latin American countries, women in Argentina continue to be victims of domestic violence as well as sexual harassment, and especially rape (Ocampo, 2003).

In 1975, the UN launched the so called "International Year of Women" during the World Conference in Mexico City, where governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) recognized international cooperation, the consolidation of international peace and women's political participation as definite areas for national and international action (Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality, n.d.). However, this event did not have any impact on the Argentinian society, which was mainly characterized by the absence of activists and a repressive political situation (Ocampo, 2003). Suffice it to know that several women had to flee the country during the military regimes, however, when they began to return in 1983, they became pivotal for the establishment of a new legal framework for women (Ocampo, 2003). Two years later, in fact, Argentina approved the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and in 1994, the National Constituent Convention combined the ratification of the CEDAW into the new constitution (Ocampo, 2003).

In the 1980s, Argentina was able to conquer other two juridical tools that enabled women to have a greater legal standing within the family, them being the Filiation and Inheritance Statute and the Divorce Law (Ocampo, 2003). Even if women in Argentina gained the vote in 1947, and some of them had been elected, it was only in 1992 that the law on quotas for elective office was passed, finally allowing women to have an equal opportunity of being appointed (Ocampo, 2003). However, it is important to say that even if women were gaining more and more space, especially in the political realm, this did not happen without fights and vigorous attacks against female activism (Cords, 2021). Moreover, sometimes the progress achieved was an

illusion, as in the case of the incorporation of the CEDAW into the Argentine constitution, that was later dragged by then President Carlos Menem who introduced the national celebration of the Day of the Unborn Child, clearly asking for the attention of the dominant conservative sector of the Catholic Church (Ocampo, 2003).

As aforementioned, Latin America sees high rates of gender violence in its continent, and Argentina surely is a case in point. In fact, according to the Global Database on Violence against Women, Argentinian women suffer from different forms of violence, them being primarily physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence (26.9%) and non-partner sexual violence (12.1%) (UN Women, 2016). However, violence in most of these cases usually ends up in femicides. For this reason, in 2015, the movement *Ni Una Menos*, in English translated as Not One Less, gathered thousands of Argentinians, primarily women, who marched towards *Plaza de Mayo* in Buenos Aires to pursue justice for all the women who lost their lives under ruthless circumstances (Durano, 2020). The latter is often referred to as *femicidio*, indicating the murder of the female victim who is frequently committed by an intimate partner (Durano, 2020). As *Ni Una Menos* consolidated as a movement, feminists started to ask for the protection of women's rights and their expansion, as in the case of the legalization of abortion. However, female activists, despite being fundamental for a crucial shift, are not the only factor required to bring about a serious and permanent change in the Argentinian society. In fact, there are other issues currently posing a threat to women's advancement, them being respectively the country's growing economic crisis, along with the high unemployment rates and the large gender pay gaps (Durano, 2020).

As it should be clear at this point, gender equality is still far from being fully achieved in Argentina. For this reason, the National Women's Congress (NWC) holds rallies and workshops annually, to fight the highly sexist and religious society of the country (Trigona, 2006). Additionally, this Congress focuses on the job market, which continues to discriminate against women, building barriers that prevent them from reaching managerial and executive positions, that in turn remain one of the causes for the existing poverty and inequality of the country (Trigona, 2006). Still, it is worth mentioning that Argentina has actually quite high rates of female leadership in politics, even reaching a higher percentage of women in parliament than many leading countries in this field, such as the Netherlands (Jazmin, 2021). Therefore, once again, Argentina confirms the paradox of female empowerment and gendered violence in a continent where femicide remains a crucial issue, especially in the age of the Covid-19 pandemic (Jazmin, 2021).

### **3.1.3. The precedent of Eva de Perón and the election of Cristina Fernández de Kirchner**

Historically speaking, as aforementioned, the Argentinian political realm has been mainly male dominated over the years (Jazmin, 2021). Accordingly, the status of women in the region has been primarily defined by the Spanish Law, which is founded on the same principles of the Roman Law and the Catholic Church (Mercer, 1998). However, nowadays, women have gained much more power in the political sphere, making up for more than a third of the parliament (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2019). More precisely, there have been several

women who have marked the history of female activism, and not only in Argentina, them being Eva de Perón, Isabel de Perón and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner.

Eva Duarte de Perón, better known as Evita, has been one of the most influential women in South America (Fraser, 1996). Born in 1919 in poor conditions and as an illegitimate child, she was crucially shaped by her early life (Fraser, 1996). She moved to Buenos Aires at the age of fifteen and eventually found minor success as an actress on a popular radio show, allowing her to catch the attention of Juan Perón, who at the time was the Secretary of Labor. According to some, it was the chemistry between the two of them that really made his career as a politician (Padhy, 2012) (Fraser, 1996). After becoming the second wife of Juan Domingo de Perón, Evita slowly became incredibly influential, especially for Argentina's working class, considering that in 1948 she founded the Eva Perón Foundation, which was very beneficial to the poor and really garnered support to the presidency of her husband (Fraser, 1996).

In other words, the fact that Juan Perón was able to amass such a devoted following was only the result of the worship towards his wife Eva, who really became a symbol in the fight for women's rights (Padhy, 2012). Hence, helping the poor was not her only favorite cause. Despite the fact that she never labelled herself as a feminist publicly, she was passionate about equality for the *mujeres* of Argentina (Padhy, 2012). More precisely, she was able to win the approval to pass the law 13.010 that entitled women and men of equal political rights and obligations. This led to the foundation of the *Partido Peronista Femenino* (Peronist Women's Party), aimed at increasing the influence of women in political life (Cords, 2021). Moreover, she was the author of the constitutional reform of 1949 that introduced the principles of conjugal legal equality and parental authority (Padhy, 2012). However, what really empowered her to bring about real changes was the appointment as Minister of Health and Minister of Labor (Padhy, 2012). Nevertheless, at the height of her involvement with both governmental and humanitarian campaigns, Eva suddenly became ill with cancer, having to renounce to run for vice president during the second term of her husband's presidency (Padhy, 2012). Another woman to take into consideration is Isabel Perón, in full Isabel Martínez de Perón, who served as President of Argentina for merely two years (1974-1976), becoming the first woman president in the world, however she was not directly elected (Cords, 2021). Originally, she was born in a lower middle-class family and worked as a dancer, until she met Juan Perón who appointed her as his personal secretary (Tikkanen, 2019). Afterwards, she accompanied him to Madrid where he was exiled, and when they returned to Argentina, Juan Perón run for President and won, appointing Isabel as his vice president (Cords, 2021). However, he suffered from several illnesses that oftentimes allowed Isabel to act as president and to ultimately succeed him in 1974 upon his death (Tikkanen, 2019).

Her administration became heir to the existing problems of inflation, labor turmoil and political violence (Tikkanen, 2019). Isabel Perón tried to solve these problems through the implementation of various policies, however, the storm surrounding her Minister of Social Welfare López Rega, accused of being involved in terrorist activities, was not of great help to her situation (Tikkanen, 2019). Moreover, she was strongly suggested to resign by moderate military officers' multiple times, but she always refused, until she was

detained by air force in 1976 and held under house arrest for five years (Tikkanen, 2019). Afterwards, she went into exile in Spain, however, in 2007 an Argentine judge demanded for her arrest through a warrant, based on the charges of consenting the armed forces to abuse human rights during her presidency (Tikkanen, 2019). After being temporarily arrested, in 2008, Spain's National Court rejected the extradition request, arguing that the charges did not represent crimes against humanity and that the statute of limitations had been surpassed (Tikkanen, 2019).

Finally, in 2007, Argentina elected its first female elected president: Cristina Fernández de Kirchner. Originally, she enters the political arena as a lawyer, up until she succeeds her husband Néstor Kirchner as President of the country for two terms (Jones, 2022). More precisely, they both entered into politics with the return of democracy in 1983, which was interrupted after the military *junta* seized control a few years earlier (Jones, 2022). Before becoming the first lady, she performed as provincial delegate to the Justicialist (*Peronist*) Party convention in 1985, she was selected for the provincial legislature and also served in the Chamber of Deputies (Jones, 2022). However, in 2007, she was ultimately elected President of Argentina reaching the 45% of votes, which was approximately double if compared to her competitor Elisa Carrió (Jones, 2022). However, soon after, her presidency raised some criticism, especially in the US, that accused her of having received funds from the Venezuelan government (Jones, 2022) (BBC, 2019).

Fernández de Kirchner implemented several policies, especially to increase export taxes to control food prices, however this resulted in major strikes led by farmers' coalitions through the country (Jones, 2022). Additionally, she focused on pursuing various social programs that resulted being quite successful, especially with respect to social minorities (Tikkanen, 2019) (BBC, 2019). For instance, in 2010 she made Argentina the first country in South America to permit same-sex marriages (Jones, 2022) and she always made clear her priorities regarding gender equality. More precisely, she believed that the latter could only be achieved through the obtainment of economic autonomy, along with the political, personal, and social independence for women (Jones, 2022). However, after her second term, she became the focus of several scandals that regarded mainly fraud and corruption, which made her lose most of consensus (Jones, 2022).

All things considered; it is possible to say that Eva Perón's legacy has been crucial for the history of female empowerment, especially when it comes to Argentina. Even though this country has been characterized by strong political instability over the years, it is equally true that several women have had the opportunity to try out for the highest offices, even winning sometimes. Yet, it would be unrealistic to state that the appointment of Isabel Perón and the electoral victory of Cristina Fernández de Kirchner are not related to the *machismo* embedded in the Argentinian society and the tendency to associate women leaders with glass cliff-type situations.



### 3.1.4. Gender quotas: lessons from Argentina

Gender quotas have been a widely used instrument in the Latin American region to promote women's access to political positions of responsibility (IDEA, 2003). More precisely, Argentina has been the first country to introduce quotas in 1991 through the so-called *Ley de Cupos*, which established a 30% quota of legislative candidates (IDEA, 2003). In other words, the case of Argentina serves as an example of the efficiency of quota systems, however, still demonstrating that the improvements towards gender equality are not always guaranteed.

First and foremost, it is important to define the political framework of the country. The Argentine Republic is founded on a bicameral parliament that uses voluntary party quotas and legislated quotas for the lower and upper house, but also at the subnational level (IDEA, 2022). Currently 45 % of the seats of the Chamber of Deputies are held by women (IDEA, 2022). However, it is worth mentioning that the success of the law is supported by the features of the Argentine electoral system, in which parties propose a closed list of candidates, with fixed ranks, and voters must vote for the entire list of this certain party (Gelb & Palley, 2009).

In Argentina, as well as in the rest of Latin America, gender quotas are to be implemented to fight and challenge the widespread culture of *machismo* and *marianismo* that have made it quite hard for women to be appreciated as leaders throughout the years (Gelb & Palley, 2009). Being excluded from politics until they were given the right to vote, women found other ways to gain attention, especially through grassroot feminist movements and trade unions (Padhy, 2012). However, as soon as they got their right, which occurred during the first presidency of Juan Perón, 29 women were elected, making up 18% of the parliament, this being primarily the result of Eva Perón's personal battle that succeeded in pushing for a quota procedure (Padhy, 2012).

**Figure 11.** Women number in the Deputies Chamber and percentage, period 1983-1995

<b>Year</b>	<b>Total number of seats</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>% Total</b>
1983-85	254	13	5.1%
1985-87	254	12	4.7%
1987-89	254	14	5.5%
1989-91	254	16	6.3%
1991-93	257	16	6.2%
1993-95	257	36	14.0%
1995-97	257	71	27.6%

*Source:* INSTECA, *Cámara de Diputados de la Nación Argentina*, 2001

As Figure 11 clearly shows, the real success of the quota law was the remarkable increase in the number of women elected in the Chamber of Deputies of Argentina (Aggio, 2001). In fact, while in 1983 the number of women in parliament was merely of 13 reaching the 5.1%, in 1995 the Argentinean Chamber of Deputies counted 71 women, which made up 27.6% of the total 257 seats (INSTECA, 2001). Thus, despite the



percentage was not yet close to half of the seats, it was growing at a quite fast pace over the years. Moreover, it is worth mentioning that this increase was not only the result of the requirement imposed by the law but was also a consequence of the need for renovation that spread in those years, especially after the elections of 1993 (INSTECA, 2001).

While women were gaining more space in politics as of the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, they were still advancing in weak institutions that did not allow them to effectively show their potential (Aggio, 2001). On the other hand, those years were also characterized by the concentration and abuse of power under Carlos Menem that obstructed women's participation in parliament (Aggio, 2001). His presidency, which lasted 10 years, was stained by the hyperinflation trauma of 1988 and 1989, that made the democracy even weaker and highlighted the lack of horizontal accountability (Aggio, 2001) (Szusterman, 2000).

Overall, it can be said that Argentina saw a significant increase of women in the political arena, especially in parliament, mainly due to the implementation of quotas. However, this rise was not favored by the institutional context, which especially under Menem, was characterized by a weak and oftentimes corrupted democracy (Spruk, 2019). Moreover, women did not have much power space in the executive and were usually appointed in committees that are generally regarded as more feminine, such as the case of the Commission for Women, family, and minority as well as the Commission for Human Rights (Aggio, 2001). Thus, they were only given the chance to address issues related to women or minorities, not being considered capable enough for other sectors that have been historically linked to male leaders, such as security and foreign affairs (Aggio, 2001). Still, it is worth mentioning that the Quota Law in Argentina constitutes a remarkable achievement in terms of women empowerment (Aggio, 2001).

## **3.2. Chile**

Chile has been one of South America's swiftest growing economies in recent decades, allowing the country to considerably diminish its poverty, however, many challenges remain to be faced, as exposed during the protests of 2019-20 (World Bank, 2021). Traditionally, women in this country have had to fight the implanted stereotypes of gender roles and the strong patriarchal culture embedded in society. Nevertheless, during last century women were able to increase their power by partaking in politics and protests, which enabled them to obtain constitutional provisions that protected gender equality and outlawed sex discrimination (World Bank, 2021). To go more in depth, according to the Global Gender Gap Report of 2021, Chile ranks 70<sup>th</sup> out of the 156 countries taken into account in the study, with a score of 0.716, where 0.00 is imparity and 1.00 parity (World Economic Forum, 2021).

### **3.2.1. Historical premise on Chile**

Chile has consistently stood out among its neighbors (Kline et al., 2018). Historically speaking, it was unique in the region as one of the most socially conservative countries in the continent (Long, 2012). Moreover, it is

worth mentioning that its history, as that of Argentina, has been characterized by historical experiences of party politics and military regimes, as well as by the emergence of new political actors in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, including labor unions and women's organizations (Gray, 2003).

Chile was one of the most far-flung territories within the Spanish domain and, thus, relatively poor, if compared to other areas of the empire (Kline et al., 2018). For most of its colonial time, it was officially ruled from Lima, but natural barriers such as the Atacama Desert and the Andes Mountains, along with the ferocious resistance to Spanish colonization of the indigenous *Mapuches*, made it necessary to create a captaincy general, which lasted from 1551 to 1818 (Kline et al., 2018). As a result, despite the official political adherence, the area began to develop a distinct identity. However, in 1808 Napoleon occupied Spain, and then forced Ferdinand II, who was king at the time, to abdicate and tried to impose his brother as the Spanish ruler (Kline et al., 2018). Consequently, this led to a civil war in Chile, that the Chileans have divided in three distinct periods: la *Patria Vieja* (1810-1814), la *Reconquista* (1814-1817) and la *Patria Nueva* (1817-1828) (Gray, 2003). In this last occasion, combined Argentine and Chilean troops, led by Bernardo O' Higgins, beat the Spanish at the battle of *Chacabuco* in 1817 and reclaimed the region for the patriot's side (Drake, 1995).

Once the Spanish were permanently expelled from the Chilean mainland in 1818, Chile faced the exact same problem that nearly every other Latin American country did during this period: it had to decide which kind of government to establish and which rule of law (Drake, 1995). At first, O' Higgins ruled as an authoritarian with the title of Supreme Director, but he promptly alienated most of the Chilean elite (Drake, 1995). Consequently, he faced massive unrest and resigned to avoid a civil war in 1823. Unfortunately for Chileans, his patriotic gesture did not solve the underlying conflicts, and, for this reason, the country faced constant violence in the following years (Kline et al., 2018). This pattern was almost identical to other South American countries, but while Chile's neighbors continued to experience instability, the Chilean country was able to forge not just a stable state, but one with increasing capacity, eventually opening up to democracy much sooner than the other countries (Drake, 1995).

In this regard, it is worth mentioning three main factors. First of all, the leadership of Diego Portales, who centralized power around himself and used it to weaken opposing factions but was also able to bring capacity to the state (Drake, 1995). Most importantly he did this as a minister, and not as president, which made it easier to create a conservative consensus which he then brought into the constitution of 1833, that would not be replaced until 1925. Contrary to other Latin American countries, Portales was not a *Caudillo*, he cared little for politics and even power. In fact, he was merely interested in constructing a government conducive to business (Drake, 1995). The second factor was that a war against a Peru-Bolivian confederation from 1836 to 1839 deepened the country's nationalism and softened any differences that might have existed amongst elite (Drake, 1995). Finally, the third aspect was that the successor of Portales followed his example and this pattern continued with only minor conflicts until 1891 (Drake, 1995).

This level of peace quickly allowed Chile to grow economically, fueled by a mining boom and agricultural exports, especially wheat (Siavelis, 2017). By 1870, its GDP per capita was twice as big as Mexico, more than

twice as big as Venezuela and larger than Brazil (Siavelis, 2017). The economic boom and government capacity quickly brought Chile into conflict with its neighbors, causing the declaration of a series of wars regarding mostly Peru and Bolivia. In the end, the Chilean institutional and economic advantaged prevailed, and the Bolivian military was decimated (Siavelis, 2017). Afterwards, in the decades between 1861 and 1891, what the Chileans called the Liberal Republic had taken over, however this often led to deadlock and bitter rivalries in 1891. This resulted in the explosion of a civil war, and the Chilean military, as a consequence, became divided between those who supported congress and those who supported the president of the army (Siavelis, 2017).

After the 1891 war, Chilean oligarchical politics continued even as power shifted from the president to congress (Drake, 1995). Still, with the growing mobilization of the middle and new working class, powerful movements began to challenge the authority of the oligarchy (Siavelis, 2017). As nitrate, coal and copper production expanded, so too did the demand for workers' better conditions. At this point, while the oligarchy enjoyed massive houses, workers lived in squalor (Siavelis, 2017). Even worse, the politics of the day prevented any of these demands from being channeled to those in power. Thus, the so-called Parliamentary era, that went from 1891 to 1925, was one where the working and middle class continued to grow but were excluded from political power (Drake, 1995).

The breakdown of this system occurred in 1925, with a double military coup (Kline et al., 2018). The latter, led by young officers, mostly from the middle and working class, paved the way for a new constitution, which was shaped by the then President Arturo Alessandri (Siavelis, 2017). The new constitution separated the church from the state and created direct election for the appointment of the president, but also introduced a graduated income tax and adopted some workers' protection (Drake, 1995). Still, authoritarian instability persisted, and democracy did not return until 1932, when Chile entered its modern political era (Siavelis, 2017).

On September 11<sup>th</sup>, 1973, a coup took place and that eventually set up Augusto Pinochet as a dictator, with the military in control of most of the country, including the media (Kline et al., 2018). At first, there was significant support for the coup in Chile, including Christian democratic leaders and sectors of the Catholic Church (Kline et al., 2018). This was due to a widespread supposition that the military would remain in power only for a few months, stabilizing the economy and quickly calling for new elections (Kline et al., 2018). On the other hand, the military shut down congress, banned parties and trade unions, and engaged in a 17-years project aimed at fundamentally transforming Chilean politics, economics, and society (Kline et al., 2018). Moreover, the Pinochet regime had a new constitution written in 1980 that extended his power until 1988 and modified the electoral system to his own advantage. However, in 1988 a new plebiscite took place, this time it was far more transparent due to the pressure of the international community (Kline et al., 2018). In the end, Pinochet lost, leaving the country with a glimmer to return to democracy, in conflict with the principles of the constitution (Kline et al., 2018).

Finally, one of the most important elements of Pinochet's legacy regards the economy. Famously, during the dictatorship, Chile followed an aggressive free market economic policy of widespread deregulation and privatization guided by the Chilean economists trained in the US by Milton Friedman (Kline et al., 2018). While according to some this is the reason behind the growth in the economy, it is equally true that inequality expanded right along with it (Kline et al., 2018) (Siavelis, 2017). This has led to much frustration in Chilean society, that motivated by the need of renewal elected the first female president of the country in 2006: Michelle Bachelet.

### **3.2.2. The status of women in the Chilean society**

Over the years, the status of women in Chile has improved, particularly since the regime returned to a democracy in the 1990s (Galleguillos et al., 2005). However, full gender equality is still a goal to be pursued in the Chilean agenda, considering that women continue to face several economic and political challenges, notably domestic violence, and income inequality (World Bank, 2021). In this regard, there have been many factors influencing women's condition in the country, but among the most relevant there surely are Catholicism and the rooted *machismo* in the society.

First of all, Chile is often considered as one of the most socially conservative countries in South America (Long, 2012). In fact, there have not been as many feminist movements in this country, if compared to the others in the region. However, it should be recalled that some groups of women protested against Salvador Allende in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and some others took it to the streets also during Augusto Pinochet's regime (Haas, 2010). More precisely, during the latter regime, the status of women's legal rights was one of the worst Latin America had ever seen, especially when it came to recognizing their reproductive rights, this despite being one of the strongest economies at the time (Haas, 2010). Things started to change only after 1990, when the country restored democracy and finally started financing the expansion of welfare programs, also in terms of gender equality (Pribble, 2006).

The role played by religion in Chile has extremely influenced the establishment of gender roles and society in general (Cultural Atlas, 2020). More precisely, the Chilean country has been deeply persuaded by Christianity, notably Catholicism (66.7%), followed by Protestantism and just partially by Jehovah's Witnesses (Cultural Atlas, 2020). Roman Catholicism has been the most relevant one over the years, being introduced in Chile by Spanish colonialists and still dominating today (Cultural Atlas, 2020). Accordingly, most Chileans accept the authority of the priest and the Pope, who is the head of the Roman Catholic Church (Cultural Atlas, 2020). However, the most important aspect to take into consideration in this regard is the influence of Catholicism on the authoritarian regime of Augusto Pinochet, considering that the Church has played a significant role in the downfall of the dictatorship and endures to impact the Chilean culture, society and, of course, politics (Guzmán et al., 2010).

More specifically, under Pinochet's government, the Catholic Church established an office for the defense of human rights, also endowing grassroots women's movements (Guzmán et al., 2010). Therefore, albeit initially

the Church supported *la junta*, which deposed and executed the socialist president Allende, once it became aware of the multiple violations perpetrated against socialists and communists, it encouraged the Chilean Catholic population to take a stance against the regime (Ruberto, 1978). However, after the restoration of democracy in the country, the Church returned to being conservative and traditional, still maintaining its influence on the population, despite the decline in religious followers (Cultural Atlas, 2020).

One of the major topics at the heart of the debate, when it comes to Catholicism and women's empowerment is the issue of abortion, along with that of divorce (Cultural Atlas, 2020). Chile has been one of the last countries worldwide to authorize divorce, considering that it occurred in 2004 (Bonney, 2017). At the same time, abortion remains banned under approximately all circumstances (Bonney, 2017). Still, it shall be mentioned that there are some extreme cases in which abortion becomes legal, and this has been the result of Michelle Bachelet's presidency, according to which each woman should be able to make decisions based on her values, principles, or religion (Bonney, 2017). Therefore, such a conquest represented a fundamental achievement for her government and towards women of Chile, who had been suffering for too long from the barriers and prejudice affecting society (Bonney, 2017). Accordingly, it is evident that the conservative and traditional influence of the Church in Chile has also had a quite significant role behind the slow obtainment of women's right, which still is to be fully attained (Cultural Atlas, 2020).

Moreover, Chilean women continue to be discriminated in the labor market (Recavarren & Arekapudi, 2020). Chile, in fact, has had one of the lowest rates of employment in the continent, and for this reason, women have protested in the last years to demand equal treatment, urging the government to address the issues of gender-based violence as well as the perseverance of traditional gender roles (Recavarren & Arekapudi, 2020). Furthermore, while there exists legislation forbidding sexual harassment in the workplace, there actually are no criminal punishments for its perpetrators nor obligations for equal remuneration (Recavarren & Arekapudi, 2020). However, what makes it even worse is the fact that women are discriminated against also in the home. In fact, the persistence of the conjugal society continues to have a strong impact on the financial inclusion of women, even deterring their access to credit (Recavarren & Arekapudi, 2020).

### **3.2.3. Michelle Bachelet: from dictatorship victim to first *presidenta* of Chile**

It often happens that female leaders, especially in politics, avoid labeling themselves as feminists, as in the case of Angela Merkel (Semenova & Evdokimova, 2021). The reasons behind this are many, but it usually goes back to the trait approach and the "think leader, think male" bias, meaning that calling oneself a feminist is often thought to be detrimental for a woman's figure. However, in 2006, Chile's first *presidenta*, Michelle Bachelet, embraced the term, claiming that feminism is not something related to women, but instead it is for everyone (Semenova & Evdokimova, 2021).

In a conservative and Catholic country as Chile, the election of Michelle Bachelet marked a historic breakthrough, her being a single mother, social democrat, and atheist (Semenova & Evdokimova, 2021). She was elected, in fact, in a country where divorce was just legalized two years before and abortions were still



completely illegal (Semenova & Evdokimova, 2021). In other words, she became the symbol of progress in a very patriarchal country. However, Michelle Bachelet, as many other women holding high positions, had to face numerous misogynistic and sexist situations (Semenova & Evdokimova, 2021).

Nowadays, she represents a role model for many people, especially young women, this being also the result of her story (Jimenez, 2013). Michele Bachelet's family, in fact, was persecuted by the military dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet since her father, who was an Air Force general, opposed to the ruthless military coup of 1973 (Jimenez, 2013). After that, he was imprisoned and tortured, and so were Bachelet and her mother, who were forced to leave the country in the end (Jimenez, 2013). However, these experiences were able to shape her identity, making her a true advocate for the value of democracy and human rights (Semenova & Evdokimova, 2021). Still, after having spent four years in exile, she returned to Chile and became a doctor, never thinking that she would become president, because, as she said, ambition was thought to be "a bad thing for women" (Semenova & Evdokimova, 2021, pp.1). Nevertheless, a few years later, more precisely in 1990, she started a career in the Ministry of Health, which was followed in turn by other two important positions: Ministry of Defense and President of Chile for two terms. However, during the years of interval from the first to the second term, she also covered the role of head of UN Women (Semenova & Evdokimova, 2021).

In 2005, Michelle Bachelet was selected as presidential candidate by the *Concertación de los Partidos por la Democracia* (CPD), or the Coalition of Parties for Democracy in English, which was a group of center and center-left parties (Augustyn, 2021). Her campaign concentrated on restructuring the pension system, endorsing the rights of women and the poor, as well as recognizing the rights of the indigenous *Mapuche* people at the constitutional level (Augustyn, 2021). Still, what she was constrained to focus on was the fact that she was divorced and a mother of three children in addition to being agnostic, which in a country historically dominated by the Catholic Church was quite the task (Augustyn, 2021). Nevertheless, in 2006, she was able to defeat the conservative candidate Sebastián Piñera with the 53%, thus becoming the first female president of Chile (Augustyn, 2021).

Her presidency was initially challenged by several difficulties, that mainly dealt with the discontent of people who broke out in protests, meaning that her popularity sharply declined (Augustyn, 2021). However, in the second half of her term, she was able to regain some consensus especially due to her economic policies (Augustyn, 2021). In the end, in fact, she was able to manage the global financial crisis of 2008, she funded pension reforms and was also credited with diminishing poverty and enhancing education, especially the primary one (Augustyn, 2021). Since the constitution did not allow for a second consecutive term, Bachelet tried out for presidency in 2014, becoming the first President of Chile to be elected twice after the end of the authoritarian regime of Pinochet (Augustyn, 2021). This time her campaign was focused on ameliorating education, revising the constitution and enhancing rights of women and of the LGBTQ community, comprising the legalization of at least some forms of abortions (Augustyn, 2021).

In other words, as Chilean president, Michelle Bachelet always spoke up for women, and this allowed her to hold another powerful position: UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (GPE Secretariat, 2015). She

always believed that the way to change the world is through politics, because she deemed it to be the only way to address the structural roots and causes of social and economic diseases (Semenova & Evdokimova, 2021). This, however, was not easy given the numerous sexist situations she had to face, always being criticized for her body and her clothes, something that her male colleagues never experienced (Semenova & Evdokimova, 2021). With this being said, it becomes evident that Michelle Bachelet stands as a historical turning point in the history of Chile and women in general, her becoming President in one of the most socially conservative country in Latin America founded on patriarchy and religion, and thus being one of the examples par excellences of the paradox of *machismo* and women empowerment.

### **3.3. What's next? Bridging the gap**

Despite the fights and the international agreements to fight gender equality, global gender gaps persist (Brader, 2022). More precisely, as showed in the Global Gender Gap Report of 2021, gender gaps persist in education, economics, politics, and health at the global level (World Economic Forum, 2021). Considering the massive challenges facing South America in 2020, attaining real gender equality might seem impossible, however it would be unrealistic to state that this region has not already made significant progress in the last twenty years (AQ Editors, 2020). Still, it is worth mentioning once again that the pandemic is causing progress to be reversed all over the world (AQ Editors, 2020). In fact, after Covid-19 women seem to be more engaged than ever in the unpaid household work, such as cleaning and childcare, which forces them to set down their professional career path (AQ Editors, 2020). For this reason, it is important to act through different measures, including government policies, the role played by education as well as financial incentives, to prevent this phenomenon from worsening worldwide.

#### **3.3.1. Government and policy**

One of the first major steps to take towards gender equality is certainly understanding the problem, meaning that recognizing the existence of a problem oftentimes results to be an important part of the solution (World Economic Forum, 2022). However, the slow narrowing of the gap makes it clear that far more dynamic attempts must be made in this context. For instance, investing in policies to support women to go back to the workplace, especially after the pandemic, could really make a difference (World Economic Forum, 2022). More precisely, governments could advance care leave or offer more preschools to narrow the motherhood penalty gap (World Economic Forum, 2022), that as previously mentioned, is one of the main causes behind the persistency of the gender pay gap.

Governments have the power to play a significant role in quickening the progress towards gender parity, through legislation, fiscal measures but also public-private partnerships (Gupta et al., 2019). For instance, in Singapore, the women's labor force participation ratio actually doubled thanks to the implementation of a series of policies that enabled women to achieve work-life balance, including paid and unpaid childcare leave

but also paid maternity leave (Gupta et al., 2019). Another example is Japan, which is perhaps the country offering the highest paid paternity leave in the world, however very few men took advantage of it (Gupta et al., 2019). Accordingly, Canada is one of the most committed countries in achieving gender equality, the latter being also defined as “the single most acted-on SDG in Canada in 2017” (Gupta et al., 2019, pp. 1).

Women covering more and more leadership roles also results to be fundamental (World Economic Forum, 2022). In fact, since 2015 women are holding more senior positions, and this has allowed female leaders worldwide to come together to tackle several issues still affecting our society (World Economic Forum, 2022). As a result, the so-called snowball effect has caused an even higher rise in women’s participation, meaning that women holding leadership roles usually have the tendency to hire more women, being aware of the bias and trying to increase hiring rates on the whole (World Economic Forum, 2022). This results to be quite significant in the labor market, considering that women tend to work part-time more often than men, as it makes it easier to combine career and family responsibilities (OECD, 2012).

However, as aforementioned, what really brings about a long-term change is the implementation of laws, regulations and policies that are able to generate a gender-neutral environment (Gupta et al., 2019). In this regard, India, for instance, introduced laws addressing domestic violence and sexual harassment, and certainly also paid maternity leave (Gupta et al., 2019). Another case in point is Germany with the introduction of the 12 months of paid leave, which steered the country towards a serious rise in women’s workforce participation as well as in the fertility rate (Gupta et al., 2019). A further case is certainly that of quota laws, which, as widely portrayed in previous sections, are a great example of a positive tool that can enhance women’s participation, especially in the political domain that, despite the progress attained over the years, remains the most affected by gender discrimination (Aggio, 2001). With regards to this, Argentina deserves to be mentioned, being one of the countries where quota laws have proven to be most effective for the creation of a parliament that is able to represent its population almost entirely (Aggio, 2001).

Furthermore, governments are also major employers in several countries, implying that they could both offer good jobs to women, as well as be an example to follow, for society in general (Gupta et al., 2019). For instance, in the United Kingdom women are currently holding more senior positions than men in the field of public administration, education and health, also due to the flexible working settings that make it easier for women to play executive roles (Gupta et al., 2019). Another country following its steps is Indonesia, however the numbers are still low to be counted as a real change (Gupta et al., 2019). Still, if governments are not able to follow this pattern, partnerships could be the real answer to really fast-track this progress (Gupta et al., 2019). In this regard, it is worth mentioning the so-called *Chefsache*, “CEO Priority” in English, which was a movement supported by the former German Chancellor Angela Merkel to promote the representation of women in senior and managerial positions in different sectors, including media and technology (Gupta et al., 2019). Therefore, it seems clear that bolstering the capacity of governments to employ gender-responsive approaches is a great method to enhance the impact on both legal and social frameworks (OECD, 2012).



### 3.3.2. The role of education

A factor achieving resounding success when it comes to gender equality worldwide, and especially in Latin America, has been education (WBG, 2015). More precisely, with respect to the achievement of gender parity in primary school enrollment (WBG, 2015). The equality of opportunities in education, in fact, has been recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) of 1948, as well as in the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) of 1979 (Ganguli et al., 2013). Therefore, for the reasons aforementioned, it is oftentimes also referred to as “the great equalizer” (WBG, 2015).

Countries over the world are making significant progress in terms of gender equality and education (Anderson, 2012). More precisely, as stated by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), more than two-thirds of countries worldwide have reached fair shares of girls and boys enrolled in primary schools, however the ratio becomes biased as the level of education progresses (Anderson, 2012). Moreover, despite girls usually have high academic and employment aspirations, there exist systematic gender differences in different fields of study that obstruct their training and formation, especially in developing countries (OECD, 2012). Likewise, in several low-income countries, women usually tend to be engaged more than men neither in paid work nor in education (OECD, 2012).

The key to achieve gender parity in education resides in the cooperation among developing and developed countries towards the overcoming of the inequality across the world (Anderson, 2012). Thus, if all genders reached equal and fair access to education, the consequences would be major: poverty rates would drop, healthcare would progress, and productivity and income could upsurge rapidly (Anderson, 2012). More precisely, women receiving education is equal to more contributions in the labor force, thus entailing an increase of productivity and in economic gains (Anderson, 2012). Hence, the more educated a population is, the better is the expectancy of future life decisions, starting from their children (Anderson, 2012).

One policy option that is often suggested in order to bridge the gap in education is hiring female teachers, however there is not much evidence to prove the effectiveness of it (Muralidharan & Sheth, 2015). According to research carried out in the University of California in San Diego, both male and female educators are more effective at teaching students of their own gender, this being established using five years of panel data, school-grade, and student gender by grade fixed effects (Muralidharan & Sheth, 2015). However, according to the same source, female educators appear to be more effective on the whole, resulting in improvements in girls' test scores by an additional 0.036 in years when taught by a female teacher, with no adverse effects on boys when they are taught by female educators (Muralidharan & Sheth, 2015). Still, there is not enough research to prove that the former is a valid hypothesis, meaning that what really matters is the equal access of both sexes to education, not only in primary school enrollment but also as the education level advances.

### 3.3.3. Financial incentives and support

At the Third International Conference on Financing for Development in Addis Ababa of 2015, the United Nations made clear that the investments towards the achievement of gender equality were not enough to bring about a real change in society (INFF, 2022). However, throughout the years, financial incentives for gender equality have improved through national budgets, private sector investments but also through domestic and international financial systems (INFF, 2022). In other words, public investments really have the power to change things if accompanied by the right policies, however most of the times the work and cooperation of the public and private sectors is required for long-term effects (Gupta et al., 2019).

The financial disparities existing between women and men in this century remain a crucial challenge, especially in developing countries and despite the role played by SDGs in the last years (INFF, 2022). At the global level, nearly one billion women remain outside the formal financial system, implying that solely half of the world's women participates in the workforce, usually in informal employment or in jobs that do not protect them through the implementation of labour laws, thus lacking general social protection (INFF, 2022). Moreover, it is worth mentioning that chiefly in developing and underdeveloped countries, women spend less time in education than men, primarily because of the restricted access to technology, information, and resources for personal development along with the gender-blind policies that fail to address the issue, oftentimes worsening it (INFF, 2022). In fact, unwavering discriminatory social and cultural norms limit the economic and social role of women in most countries worldwide (OECD, 2012).

There have been different hypotheses brought up as ways for governments to address the existing barriers for women. According to the World Bank Group, there certainly are subsidies and grants, tax incentives and public procurement incentives (Kronfol et al., 2019). Still, it shall be reminded that their efficiency and effectiveness depend on the core restrictions to gender equality, the targeted policy goals, employment features, and the wider enabling environment (Kronfol et al., 2019). For instance, through credit subsidies, governments are able to offer loan guarantees to female entrepreneurs, which will allow in turn companies or individuals to borrow directly from governments or from a bank if the government performs as a guarantor (Kronfol et al., 2019). On the other hand, tax incentives consent governments to sustain certain activities or outcomes by freeing firms from some tax obligations (Kronfol et al., 2019). More precisely, these tax incentives could be aimed at hiring or promoting women, but most importantly to provide childcare, training, and parental leave (Kronfol et al., 2019). A further incentive tool that could be used by governments would be public procurement incentives which can endorse gender parity through the government's purchasing power, especially when it comes to firms that encounter certain requirements in terms of hiring or promoting women (Kronfol et al., 2019).

All things considered, it is clear that reaching full gender equality could only be an advantage for the whole society, considering that greater gender parity, among the other things, enhances female labor participation and economic growth (OECD, 2012). In other words, improving the status of women, especially in the labor market, is the prerequisite for a strong, sustainable, and well-adjusted forthcoming economy (OECD, 2012).

However, gender disparity does not mean merely renouncing to the important inputs that women bring to the economy, it also means losing years of investment in educating girls and women (OECD, 2012). Therefore, the role of education, efficient government policies as well as financial investments are the first steps to take to ensure a radical cultural and social change in a world where gender stereotypes will no longer have a place to exist.

## Conclusion

The present thesis has sought to unfold the paradox of the embedded *machismo* and the phenomenon of *presidentas* in Latin America. More precisely, after having established a general framework of the gender gap on different levels, this work has focused on the highly controversial situation in South America. This continent, in fact, is an emblematic example when it comes to the paradox of countries that, in spite of being rather socially and economically backwards, still emerge unexpectedly at the forefront in the political arena. Hence, the focus of this work has been the analysis of the complex dynamics behind the incongruity between the precarious reality of most women in the region and the comparatively high number of elected female presidents.

In order to do so, this thesis has been organized in three main chapters, each with a precise scope to reach the final conclusions. Chapter I has concentrated on the theoretical framework of the gender gap, being it one of the major issues at the heart of the debate in this century. Therefore, it has taken into account all the major variables and consequences to lay the foundations for the following two chapters. Chapter II has rather focused on the context of Latin America, its democratization process, and its effects on the status of women in the continent. Hence, it was concerned with the origins of *machismo* and *marianismo*, as important concepts to depict the struggle between the rooted patriarchy and women empowerment. Finally, Chapter III has examined the case of gender equality in two countries of the continent, namely Argentina and Chile, them being a case in point for the breakdown of the paradox. Moreover, it dealt with the analysis of a possible future scenario along with some possible solutions to finally bridge the gap.

To summarize, the gender gap and its narrowing are perhaps one of the greatest advances of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, several countries still need to face a series of challenges in this regard, which after the pandemic will be even more arduous. Throughout the years, the main cause of the gender gap has seemed to lie in gender stereotypes, which originated from gender roles, that in turn have been historically detrimental for a woman's role in society and have limited her participation. In other words, male dominance in decision-making positions has been regarded as naturally legitimate and undisputable, while, in the family, it has been respectively seen as biologically indispensable for the well-functioning of the whole household. As times have changed, so have people's expectations about gender roles, however several present events portray how far the so-called glass ceiling still is from being shattered.

The double bind effect as well as the trait approach are some of the theories that have been used to explain the cognitive bias behind male and female leadership, which have affected primarily the political domain. The latter, in fact, stands as one of the worst sectors with the lowest levels of gender equality and representation. Therefore, women in politics, and chiefly those in leadership positions, are often the target of a criticism that is more based on their gender rather than their policies. Moreover, there is substantial evidence that suggests that women candidates often go out of their way to prove how experienced they are, or for instance they have to pay more attention to their political speeches, especially in terms of style, tone of voice, or the words and subjects chosen.

The case of Latin America presents numerous controversial aspects in this regard. In fact, albeit this continent is characterized by notoriously high rates of discrimination and harassment, it is equally true that it has had some of the highest-ranking female government leaders in the world. According to this work, there are several reasons behind this paradox.

First of all, the historical framework of the continent is of utter importance to portray a clear image of the gender gap issue. In fact, as it should be clear at this point, South America has been characterized by a fairly high political instability that developed as a consequence of colonialism and the Cold War. In other words, the influence of these external factors has caused the alternation of political disagreements that have led not only to a general fragmentation, but also to civil wars. Furthermore, the appearances of *Caudillos* all over the continent have caused the creation of a system founded on personal loyalty rather than fair institutions. Hence, there have been multiple leaders that have taken advantage of the instability of their country to ride the wave of indignation and resentment with what was perceived as an elitist form of democracy. Therefore, despite the democratization process that followed the Cold War, it soon became evident that many of the democracies that emerged were relatively fragile, afflicted by issues as pervasive inequality, violence, and institutional weakness. This was nothing else but the result of the general institutional instability, characterized mainly by the dictatorships of the '60s and the '70s and the shortage of growth in the '80s, followed by the neoliberal imposition of the '90s.

At the same time, *marianismo* and *machismo*, both representing the basis of genders' construction in Latin America, have been crucial with regard to the paradox here analyzed. In fact, notwithstanding the region's educational expansion, the process of democratization, and the adoption of women-friendly legislation, *marianismo* and *machismo* have both involuntarily contributed to the election and appointment of some of the *presidentas*, as in the case of Laura Chinchilla and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner.

Moreover, another possible answer to this paradox resides in the concept of the glass cliff. According to the latter, in times of crisis it is women who are put in charge, meaning that they are given power in circumstances where the probability for failure is extraordinarily high. To be more precise, there have been situations in which women have been appointed as presidents not only as mere replacements of their husbands, but after military coups, for instance, and thus, denying them the possibility to really prove their worth, as in the case of Lidia Gueiler Tejada in Bolivia. However, this is also the result of the "think crisis, think female" cognitive bias.

Still, it shall be mentioned that, in 2014, Latin America counted four female presidents at the same time, respectively Michelle Bachelet in Chile, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner in Argentina, Laura Chinchilla in Costa Rica e Dilma Rousseff in Brazil. At this point, in addition to the reasons aforementioned, there is a further one to be taken into consideration: the irruptive need for renewal, originated mainly as a result of the military dictatorships marking the continent. The latter, in fact, has pushed the electorate to make strategic and counter-current choices, electing a high number of *presidentas* despite the presence of a deeply rooted *machismo* in the society.

Therefore, it is clear that the main reasons behind this paradox surely lie in the consolidation of democratic institutions, the strong feminist movements, and the robust regional push towards egalitarian legislation, however, as showed above, there are other aspects more peculiar to the regional context that shall be taken into account to really grasp the motives behind the controversies.

All things considered, it is clear that the gender gap persists globally. For this reason, over the years there have been numerous international treaties and agreements to ensure that gender equality would be a priority, chiefly for governments and businesses. For instance, gender parity stands as one of the seventeen goals adopted by the United Nations in the post-2015 development agenda. Likewise, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women has been another major historic turning point in the fight against gender inequality. However, more profound measures need to be adopted to address this issue once and for all, and thus to guarantee a radical change in society. The most efficient would surely be effective and gender-neutral government policies, the improvement of education, not only in primary school, as well as the increase of financial incentives and support.

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## Abstract

La presente tesi ha lo scopo di analizzare il divario di genere nell'ambito politico, concentrandosi specialmente sul paradosso del fenomeno delle *presidentas* e del *machismo* in America Latina. La scelta di questo tema si basa sul fatto che il divario di genere e il suo restringimento siano uno tra i temi più dibattuti del XXI secolo. Al giorno d'oggi, infatti, nonostante gran parte dei Paesi sviluppati garantisca alle donne le stesse opportunità degli uomini in termini di accesso all'istruzione e al mercato del lavoro, una vera e propria parità nei risultati non risulta ancora assicurata. In altre parole, sebbene attualmente le donne ricoprano ruoli e svolgano compiti che fino a pochi anni fa erano inaccessibili o prerogativa maschile, va detto che attualmente sono ancora soggette a stereotipi di genere, soprattutto in campi come la politica. A questo proposito, il contesto latino-americano è l'esempio più calzante, specie rispetto al paradosso della coesistenza di emancipazione femminile e *machismo*. Pertanto, lo scopo di questa tesi è di analizzare l'incongruenza tra la realtà precaria della gran parte delle donne e il numero relativamente alto di presidentesse elette nel continente Sudamericano, per poi giungerne alle origini e spiegarne le motivazioni alla base.

Per fare luce su tale questione, il presente elaborato si articola in tre capitoli principali. Il primo si sofferma sull'analisi del concetto di *gender gap*, i suoi sviluppi storici e le sue implicazioni in ambito politico ed economico. Questo resoconto teorico e preliminare si propone di tracciare un quadro chiaro degli aspetti che si sono attestati notevoli rispetto alla situazione attuale e utili per la comprensione delle complesse dinamiche analizzate nelle sezioni seguenti. Il secondo capitolo, invece, si concentra piuttosto sull'analisi del divario di genere in America Latina, soprattutto in ambito politico. Questo, essendo il fulcro di tale tesi, cerca di svelare il paradosso dell'*empowerment* femminile e del *machismo*. In altre parole, partendo dalle premesse e dal quadro storico della regione, il focus principale sarà l'incongruenza tra la realtà precaria femminile e il fenomeno delle *presidentas*. Il terzo capitolo, infine, alla luce di quanto detto nei precedenti, si dedica ad un'analisi più mirata del divario di genere a livello geografico prendendo in considerazione due Paesi dell'America Latina, Argentina e Cile, con lo scopo di tracciare un quadro ancora più chiaro della situazione paradossale nel continente.

L'uguaglianza di genere non è solo un diritto umano fondamentale, ma una base essenziale per un mondo pacifico, florido e sostenibile. Le donne, infatti, rappresentano metà della popolazione mondiale, e quindi metà del suo potenziale. Nonostante siano stati raggiunti alcuni progressi nel corso degli anni, vale la pena ricordare che rimangono molte sfide da affrontare, principalmente a causa delle diverse immagini stereotipate di leadership che hanno invaso la società nel corso della storia.

L'arena politica è forse uno dei settori peggiori, con i livelli più bassi di uguaglianza e rappresentanza di genere. Diverse fonti, infatti, rivelano che le donne in tutto il mondo sono ancora esposte a discriminazioni fisiche, sessuali, economiche e psicologiche per aver scelto di entrare in politica, anche se in misura diversa a seconda di diversi fattori, come il sistema di governo del Paese, le politiche o le norme di genere tradizionali. Pertanto, risulta evidente che le donne siano sottorappresentate nell'arena politica globale, e la loro sottorappresentanza aumenta nelle posizioni di più alto rango. Difatti, quando si parla di carriera e leadership, e più in generale di

aree dominate dagli uomini, come quella politica, c'è sempre la tendenza a preferire leader maschili rispetto alle donne. Per questo motivo, esistono diverse teorie che studiano e analizzano la condizione delle donne in questi domini, tra cui il *trait approach* e il *double bind effect*.

Dal punto di vista economico, le disuguaglianze di genere legate al posto di lavoro e alla retribuzione rientrano nell'etichetta del *gender pay gap*, ossia il divario retributivo di genere. Riguardo alle cause, molteplici ricerche svoltesi in diversi Paesi palesano che la discriminazione retributiva basata esclusivamente sul genere spiega solo potenzialmente una parte del divario retributivo. Per questo motivo, molte ipotesi sono state avanzate al riguardo, e le più note coincidono sicuramente con le diverse caratteristiche personali e professionali, gli orari di lavoro preferiti, nonché il raggruppamento in industrie poi etichettate come tradizionalmente femminili, senza contare il fatto che nella maggior parte dei Paesi, fino a qualche decennio fa, era perfettamente legale pagare meno le donne. Tuttavia, il vero problema risiede nella mancanza di pari opportunità. Pertanto, dopo aver stabilito che il divario retributivo di genere non è causato dal fatto che le donne guadagnino meno degli uomini per lo stesso lavoro, è chiaro che il motivo sia in gran parte basato su un diverso percorso professionale. In effetti, ciò che le trattiene davvero è il prezzo che pagano per la maternità.

D'altro canto, diverse fonti dimostrano ampiamente l'esistenza di una correlazione alquanto forte tra maternità e segregazione professionale, soprattutto per quanto riguarda l'abbandono del mercato del lavoro. Per segregazione professionale si intende la disuguaglianza nella distribuzione di donne e uomini nelle diverse categorie occupazionali. Quest'ultima di solito si verifica quando donne e uomini tendono a concentrarsi eccessivamente in settori lavorativi specifici, che a loro volta iniziano ad essere associati ad un genere. Ad esempio, secondo l'Organizzazione internazionale del lavoro (ILO), più della metà di tutte le donne nel mondo è ora impiegata nel settore dei servizi, in particolare nell'istruzione, nella salute e nel lavoro di assistenza. Queste professioni sono spesso sottovalutate e mal pagate, nonché generalmente part-time o nell'economia informale. Pertanto, risulta chiaro che il motivo alla base della scelta di un percorso lavorativo diverso punta proprio alla maternità, principale causa del residuo divario di genere economico, e non solo.

L'America Latina è un caso emblematico rispetto al paradosso di Paesi che, pur essendo abbastanza sottosviluppati economicamente e socialmente, appaiono ancora sorprendentemente all'avanguardia dal punto di vista politico. In questo caso, la travagliata storia della regione ha giocato un ruolo cruciale nel plasmare il contesto del divario di genere, principalmente a causa dell'instabilità politica e della disuguaglianza che si sono sviluppate nell'ambito del processo di colonizzazione e della rivalità della Guerra Fredda tra Stati Uniti e Unione Sovietica. Anche per questo motivo, i Paesi dell'America Latina sono caratterizzati da molte somiglianze rispetto ai sistemi politici e contesti socioculturali, come nel caso dei sistemi presidenziali, che il più delle volte tendono a concentrare il potere nell'esecutivo, dove significative disuguaglianze sociali e regionali si sviluppano nel tempo.

Storicamente parlando, sono stati molteplici i casi in cui *leaders* politici latinoamericani hanno approfittato dell'instabilità del loro Paese per cavalcare l'onda dell'indignazione, del rancore e del legittimo risentimento verso quella che era percepita come una forma elitaria di democrazia. L'America Latina, infatti, è stata

utilizzata per decenni come banco di prova per teorie sulla democratizzazione e sui regimi politici. In altre parole, dopo la fine della Guerra Fredda la democrazia ha iniziato a riconquistare la regione nella sua interezza, fatta eccezione per Cuba. Tuttavia, divenne presto evidente che molte delle democrazie emerse erano piuttosto fragili, afflitte da problemi come disuguaglianza, violenza, impunità e debolezza istituzionale. Nel complesso, c'era la percezione che l'America Latina si stesse lasciando alle spalle un passato politico tumultuoso e, rispetto ad altre regioni del mondo in via di sviluppo, stesse progredendo anche a livello sociale ed economico, ma in realtà, il continente era sul filo del rasoio, cercando di sfuggire all'enorme vulnerabilità che aveva sofferto per secoli. In ragion di ciò, ne è conseguita un'enorme polarizzazione politica, come evidenziato dalle ultime elezioni tenutesi in Perù, in Brasile e Argentina, insieme ad una cancellazione dei sistemi partitici, perfino in Paesi che fino a poco tempo vantavano una discreta stabilità, tra cui El Salvador e Cile.

Al giorno d'oggi, la maggior parte dei Paesi del Sud America è contrassegnata da istituzioni democratiche, quindi un ritorno all'autoritarismo sotto tutti gli aspetti è piuttosto inverosimile. Tuttavia, questi regimi sono spesso in contrasto con le caratteristiche elettorali, costituzionali, rappresentative e liberali associate ai regimi democratici. Ad ogni modo, la travagliata esperienza con la democrazia in America Latina si rivela fondamentale per la comprensione della condizione delle donne nella regione. Difatti, le dittature militari della fine degli anni '60, la scarsità di crescita negli anni '80 insieme agli effetti dell'imposizione neoliberale negli anni '90 hanno aperto la strada all'instaurazione di democrazie alquanto stabili e hanno svolto un ruolo cruciale nella politicizzazione delle donne. Tuttavia, sebbene il continente abbia progredito in diverse aree, soprattutto grazie agli sviluppi democratici fatti negli anni, è altrettanto vero che oggi l'America Latina appare impantanata nell'incertezza politica. Secondo il *Global Gender Gap Report* del 2021, il cui indice misura l'uguaglianza di genere nel mondo, il punteggio regionale ponderato per la popolazione dell'America Latina è del 72,1%, rimanendo stabile dal 2020. Di conseguenza, questa regione impiegherà 68,9 anni per chiudere il restante 28,9% del divario. Nondimeno, vale la pena ricordare che la pandemia sta avendo enormi conseguenze sulla disparità di genere a livello globale e, come affermato più volte dall'ONU e dall'ILO, le donne sono le più colpite, principalmente nel mercato del lavoro.

In passato le donne non avevano alcuna voce in capitolo, soprattutto a causa dell'instabilità politica creata dall'influenza di fattori esterni nel continente latino-americano che alimentavano anche l'influenza del patriarcato. Tuttavia, nel corso degli anni, soprattutto negli ultimi decenni, il ruolo delle donne in America Latina è diventato un aspetto centrale e una forza di cambiamento piuttosto vigorosa. In altre parole, essere emarginate dalla società non ha impedito loro di lottare per i propri diritti. Ci sono stati, infatti, diversi esempi di donne che, prima ancora di ottenere il diritto al voto, hanno protestato e fondato movimenti per far sentire la loro voce. Ad esempio, nel 1946, Felisa Rincón de Gautier divenne la prima donna sindaco di una città capitale del continente. Quest'ultima credeva fermamente nel fatto che le donne non detenessero solo il diritto di voto, ma anche quello di essere attive in politica. Pertanto, l'attivismo di donne come de Guatier unito al lavoro di diverse organizzazioni internazionali e non governative ha incoraggiato alcuni governi a promuovere



nuove costituzioni, più simili a quelle occidentali, affermando che tutti i cittadini, indipendentemente dal sesso, hanno diritti sociali, politici ed economici.

Nonostante gli ultimi 30 anni di sostanziale aumento delle donne in politica in America Latina, la regione rimane ampiamente conosciuta per la sua cultura maschilista e le estenuanti battaglie condotte dalle *mujeres* in nome dei loro diritti civili e politici. È quindi importante analizzare i concetti di *machismo* e *marianismo* per comprendere le origini del mito-culto del primato maschile nella regione e la paradossale convivenza con il fenomeno delle *presidentas*.

Il *machismo* è un termine molto dibattuto nella cultura popolare, nonostante sia oggetto di numerosi articoli e ricerche. Questo termine, infatti, assume diversi significati a seconda del contesto, ma di solito si riferisce alla concettualizzazione degli uomini eterosessuali come aggressivi, dominanti e privi di emozioni. Infatti, tra le principali qualità ad esso associate, ci sono virilità, distacco emotivo e controllo. Tuttavia, nonostante la semplicità e la chiarezza di questa definizione, resta difficile stabilire l'esatta origine del termine, anche se l'evidenza suggerisce che esso ponga le sue basi negli atteggiamenti dell'alta borghesia del XVI e XVII secolo, legata ai concetti di onore, potere e vergogna, evidenziando un legame abbastanza forte soprattutto con il Messico. In altre parole, per cultura maschilista si intende l'esaltazione patologica e stereotipata della virilità: il culto della forza, dell'aggressività e della mancanza di affetto nelle relazioni che possono sfociare anche nella violenza. In base a ciò, le donne dovrebbero rimanere nei loro ruoli tradizionali, sempre un passo indietro rispetto ai loro mariti. Più precisamente, il *machismo* divide le donne in due categorie. La prima le idealizza semplicemente come esseri sessuali da conquistare e possedere, mentre la seconda le percepisce come madri, e quindi come figure autoritarie incarnanti virtù, grazia e dignità, considerando anche l'accreditato archetipo della figura materna in America Latina.

A rappresentare un quadro chiaro della regione, oltre al *machismo*, si affianca un altro concetto: il *marianismo*, contraddistinto da donne con comportamenti iperfemminili spesso considerate superiori agli uomini sul piano morale e spirituale. Il termine deriva dal nome della Vergine Maria che, secondo il Cattolicesimo, rappresenta il simbolo ultimo di purezza e maternità. Non si tratta però di un concetto religioso, anzi, si riferisce in realtà all'imposizione di un preciso modello socioculturale di donna basato sull'immacolatezza e sul sacrificio sottomesso. Quindi, tra le qualità che caratterizzano il *marianismo* vi sono la subordinazione, l'altruismo e la fedeltà al coniuge.

L'aumento della leadership femminile negli ultimi due decenni può essere accreditato a numerosi fattori, tra cui l'espansione educativa della regione, il cambiamento culturale, la democratizzazione e l'adozione di una legislazione favorevole alle donne. Tuttavia, vale la pena menzionare anche il ruolo giocato da *machismo* e *marianismo* nella politicizzazione femminile, in quanto fenomeni culturali stanti alla base della costruzione dei ruoli di genere nella cultura latino-americana. Un caso esemplare è quello di Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, eletta in Argentina nel 2017, che ha incarnato la figura della vedova dopo la morte del marito, e quindi ha esemplificato una donna sofferente che gli uomini dovrebbero difendere e proteggere. Allo stesso modo, Laura Chinchilla, eletta in Costa Rica nel 2010, che ha subito numerosi attacchi legati al suo essere



donna, essendo considerata giovane e attraente, ed è stata, poi, accettata come presidente grazie al patrocinio del precedente presidente Oscar Arias.

In aggiunta, c'è un altro concetto da prendere in considerazione a questo proposito: *the glass cliff*, ovvero “scogliera di cristallo”. Questa metafora, come risposta diretta al *glass ceiling*, ossia “soffitto di cristallo”, sostiene che alle donne vengano offerte posizioni di leadership solo in situazioni precarie. In altre parole, quando le donne riescono a sfondare il cosiddetto *glass ceiling*, si trovano in una nuova posizione pericolosa, o meglio, si ritrovano in bilico sull'orlo di una scogliera di cristallo. Esiste quindi una valida possibilità che, come nel caso delle *presidentas*, le donne possano effettivamente infrangere il *glass ceiling* solo per affrontare situazioni ad alto rischio di fallimento. Un caso specifico è quello di Janet Rosenberg Jagan, eletta presidente *ad interim* in Guyana solo dopo un colpo di stato militare.

Il fenomeno delle *presidentas* in America Latina nasce con la nomina di Isabel Martínez de Perón, prima donna a diventare presidente in Argentina come sostituzione del marito dopo la sua morte. Una situazione precaria molto simile è quella di Lidia Gueiler Tejada in Bolivia. In altri termini, inizialmente le donne hanno avuto la possibilità di salire al potere semplicemente come sostitute del marito o in situazioni precarie come dopo un colpo di stato militare, per poi arrivare al 2014, anno in cui la regione contava contemporaneamente quattro presidenti donna, rispettivamente Michelle Bachelet in Cile, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner in Argentina, Laura Chinchilla in Costa Rica e Dilma Rousseff in Brasile.

Tutto sommato, nel corso della storia moderna, il Sud America ha visto la nomina di 12 presidenti donne, includendo l'ultima elezione di Xiomara Castro in Honduras. Tuttavia, come summenzionato, bisogna riconoscere che la metà di loro è salita al potere in circostanze del tutto straordinarie caratterizzate da rotture costituzionali, e comunque non riuscendo ad equiparare il numero di presidenti uomini eletti. In altre parole, sono stati numerosi i casi in cui alle donne è stata data l'opportunità di ricoprire una determinata carica politica esclusivamente per l'alta probabilità di fallimento, rappresentando una perdita per il valore reale della leadership femminile.

A questo punto, risulta evidente che l'ascesa delle donne latinoamericane a capi di stato si scontra con la forte cultura maschilista, che spesso culmina nella discriminazione e nella violenza di genere diffusa. Difatti, nonostante l'elezione di svariate presidentesse, la maggior parte delle donne rimane sottomessa, discriminata e maltrattata nell'ambiente domestico. Pertanto, nonostante l'elezione di una donna come presidente sia un enorme passo avanti verso l'apice del progresso, un cambiamento radicale sarà possibile solo dopo un significativo mutamento sul piano sociale e culturale, in grado di combattere la sottorappresentanza politica, e non solo, per esempio attraverso l'introduzione di quote di genere. In altre parole, l'elezione di queste presidentesse deve essere supportata da un parlamento pienamente funzionante in grado di rappresentare l'intera popolazione, e quindi composto da una percentuale più o meno uguale di uomini e donne. Uno degli strumenti utilizzati per combattere questo sistema di strutture e pratiche sociali, responsabili della creazione di un divario di genere oppressivo, particolarmente in Sud America, è stato l'introduzione delle quote di genere.

Queste ultime, nonostante siano oggetto di molti dibattiti per la loro reale efficacia e il loro rapporto con la meritocrazia, si dimostrano innegabilmente uno dei fattori cruciali nel combattimento della sottomissione femminile, che ha storicamente impedito loro di raggiungere posizioni più alte nella società. Nel 2020, le Americhe si sono classificate ancora una volta al primo posto, con il 32,4% di donne in parlamento. Tuttavia, sebbene le donne rappresentino attualmente più di un quarto dei parlamentari nel mondo, è altrettanto vero che questi risultati richiedono un'enorme quantità di tempo per essere raggiunti. In altre parole, anche se le quote sembrano essere uno strumento efficace per raggiungere la parità di genere, non rappresentano la soluzione finale.

Un quadro ancora più chiaro del paradosso tra il *machismo* radicato nella società e le *presidentas* è rappresentato da due Paesi del continente sudamericano: Argentina e Cile. Queste due nazioni appaiono abbastanza simili, non solo per le loro parallele esperienze storiche di politica di partito e regimi militari fondati sul terrorismo di stato e il ruolo di influenza del Cattolicesimo, ma anche considerando che entrambi sono stati segnati dall'emergere di nuovi attori politici nel XX secolo, inclusi sindacati e movimenti femminili. Tuttavia, nonostante queste somiglianze, i due Paesi hanno affrontato una diversa transizione dai regimi militari repressivi ad istituzioni più democratiche, principalmente caratterizzate da diversi assetti istituzionali. Ad ogni modo, ciò che li rende un esempio emblematico in questo contesto è il progresso che hanno raggiunto durante i governi delle *presidentas*.

L'Argentina è un ottimo esempio di nazione ampiamente riconosciuta per i miglioramenti raggiunti nel corso degli anni verso l'uguaglianza di genere. Il Paese, infatti, si è impegnato a sostenere politiche attive per l'inclusione sociale, cercando di rompere le barriere culturali per dare più spazio e voce alle donne. Tuttavia, nonostante i progressi, le donne sono spesso ancora costrette a rimanere un passo indietro agli uomini, e per questo motivo continuano a lottare per la parità di istruzione e le pari opportunità di lavoro. Più precisamente, secondo il *Global Gender Gap Report* del 2021, l'Argentina si classifica 35° sui 156 Paesi presi in considerazione nell'analisi, con un punteggio di 0,752, dove 0,00 è imparzialità e 1,00 parità.

Storicamente parlando, l'Argentina è stata una nazione di immenso potenziale e promesse, considerando anche che si classifica come una delle più grandi economie del Sud America. Tuttavia, è altrettanto vero che i numerosi dissesti istituzionali sofferti, hanno fatto sì che la maggior parte delle risorse del Paese fosse investita nella lotta contro l'alta instabilità politica che ha segnato in modo permanente la sua storia. Difatti, l'Argentina, dopo essere decollata durante la *Belle Époque*, si è ritrovata ad affrontare un periodo di transizione politico-economica caratterizzata principalmente dalla mancanza di istituzioni politiche, da cui ne è conseguita una forte stagnazione economica. In seguito, con il primo ritorno alla democrazia nel 1954, la condizione delle donne in Argentina è variata considerevolmente, raggiungendo un livello piuttosto elevato di uguaglianza di genere. In effetti, il Paese è entrato nel nuovo secolo con un quadro giuridico molto più promettente per i diritti umani, particolarmente delle donne, lasciandosi alle spalle le tragiche dittature militari del XX secolo che ne hanno marcato terribilmente il progresso. Tuttavia, nonostante i risultati piuttosto notevoli raggiunti nel corso

degli anni, anche rispetto ad altri Paesi dell'America Latina, le donne in Argentina continuano a essere vittime di violenze domestiche e molestie sessuali.

Come accennato in precedenza, il Sud America è contraddistinto da alti tassi di violenza di genere e l'Argentina ne è sicuramente un esempio. Nel 2015, infatti, il movimento *Ni Una Menos*, ha riunito migliaia di argentini, principalmente donne, nella marcia verso *Plaza de Mayo* a Buenos Aires per perseguire giustizia per tutte le donne che hanno perso la vita sotto circostanze spietate. Tuttavia, l'attivismo femminista, pur essendo fondamentale per un cambiamento cruciale, non è l'unico fattore necessario per realizzare un cambiamento serio e permanente nella società argentina. In effetti, ci sono attualmente altre questioni che minacciano l'emancipazione delle donne, rispettivamente la crescente crisi economica del Paese, gli alti tassi di disoccupazione e i grandi divari retributivi di genere.

Ad ogni modo, vale la pena ricordare che l'Argentina conta, in realtà, tassi piuttosto elevati di leadership femminile in politica, vantando una percentuale di donne in parlamento più alta rispetto a molti Paesi leader in questo campo, come i Paesi Bassi. Questo non è che il risultato dell'operato di diverse donne che hanno segnato la storia dell'attivismo femminile argentino, tra cui Eva de Perón, Isabel de Perón e Cristina Fernández de Kirchner. La prima, ad esempio, è considerata una delle donne più influenti del Sud America, e per questo motivo è stata nominata "leader spirituale" dell'Argentina.

Il Cile è un altro caso emblematico rispetto all'anzidetto paradosso. Storicamente parlando, questo Paese si è contraddistinto come una delle economie in più rapida crescita del Sud America negli ultimi decenni, consentendogli di ridurre considerevolmente la sua povertà, tuttavia, rimangono molte sfide da fronteggiare, come emerso durante le proteste del 2019-20. Tradizionalmente, infatti, le donne cilene hanno dovuto combattere numerosi stereotipi sui ruoli di genere come risultato della forte cultura patriarcale radicata nella società. In questo caso, secondo il *Global Gender Gap Report* del 2021, il Cile si colloca al 70° posto sui 156 Paesi presi in considerazione nello studio, con un punteggio di 0,716.

Nel corso degli anni, la condizione delle donne in Cile è migliorata, in particolare da quando il regime è tornato alla democrazia negli anni '90. Tuttavia, la piena uguaglianza di genere rimane ancora un obiettivo da perseguire nell'agenda cilena, considerando che le donne continuano a dover affrontare diverse sfide sia economiche che politiche, in particolare la violenza domestica e la disuguaglianza di reddito. A questo proposito, vale la pena ricordare che molti sono stati i fattori che hanno influenzato la condizione femminile nel Paese, ma tra i più rilevanti ci sono sicuramente il Cattolicesimo e il radicato maschilismo nella società. Il Cile, difatti, è spesso considerato uno dei Paesi socialmente più conservatori del Sud America, vista anche l'assenza di un compatto attivismo femminista nel corso degli anni, fatta eccezione per le proteste contro Salvador Allende e Augusto Pinochet.

Come anzidetto, il ruolo svolto dalla religione in Cile ha fortemente influenzato l'istituzione dei ruoli di genere e della società in generale. La società cilena, infatti, è stata fortemente plagiata dal Cattolicesimo e continua ad esserlo tuttora, nonostante la riduzione di seguaci religiosi negli ultimi anni. Un caso esemplare è sicuramente l'influenza esercitata sulla caduta del regime autoritario di Augusto Pinochet. Difatti, la Chiesa,

una volta venuta a conoscenza delle molteplici violazioni perpetrate contro socialisti e comunisti, decise di incoraggiare la popolazione cattolica cilena a prendere posizione contro la dittatura.

Un altro dei grandi temi al centro di questo dibattito, specialmente relativamente all'emancipazione femminile, è la questione dell'aborto, insieme a quella del divorzio. Il Cile, infatti, è stato uno degli ultimi Paesi al mondo ad autorizzare il divorzio, legalizzato solo nel 2004. Allo stesso tempo, l'aborto rimane vietato in quasi tutte le circostanze. Tuttavia, va ricordato che, grazie alla presidenza di Michelle Bachelet, attualmente ci sono alcuni casi estremi in cui esso diventa legale.

A questo proposito, occorre dire che, in un Paese conservatore e cattolico come il Cile, l'elezione di Michelle Bachelet ha segnato una svolta storica, essendo lei una madre single, una socialdemocratica e un'atea. Bachelet è stata eletta, infatti, in un Paese dove il divorzio era stato legalizzato appena due anni prima e gli aborti erano ancora del tutto illegali. Per questo motivo, è diventata il simbolo del progresso in un Paese così patriarcale. Tuttavia, anche lei, come molte altre donne che ricoprono posizioni elevate, ha dovuto affrontare numerose situazioni misogine e sessiste.

Le sue esperienze di vita, e specialmente le sofferenze subite durante il regime militare di Pinochet, sono state in grado di plasmare la sua identità, rendendola una vera sostenitrice del valore della democrazia e dei diritti umani. Per questo motivo, qualche anno dopo il suo ritorno in Cile dall'esilio, più precisamente nel 1990, Bachelet abbandona la medicina e persegue una carriera nel Ministero della Salute, a cui sono seguiti altri due importanti incarichi: Ministro della Difesa e Presidente del Cile per due mandati. Tuttavia, negli anni di intervallo dal primo al secondo mandato, ha ricoperto anche il ruolo di capo di *UN Women*.

A questo punto, appare chiaro che al giorno d'oggi, l'America Latina deve ancora affrontare molte sfide. Tra le peggiori ci sono sicuramente sicurezza e disuguaglianza, che persistono anche a causa della piramide sociale ereditata dall'epoca coloniale. L'elezione di donne a capi di stato, dunque, per quanto progressista, si rivela un progresso illusorio in un contesto paradossale caratterizzato dalla coesistenza di un patriarcato radicato ed un'emancipazione femminile nella sfera pubblica.

Tuttavia, la situazione non è molto differente anche se si analizza il contesto globale. Difatti, nonostante le lotte e gli accordi internazionali per combattere la parità di genere, i divari di genere persistono. Più precisamente, come mostrato nel *Global Gender Gap Report* del 2021, i divari di genere perdurano nell'istruzione, nell'economia, nella politica e nella salute, con un'alta possibilità di peggioramento a seguito della pandemia. Per questo motivo è importante agire attraverso diverse misure, comprese le politiche di governo, l'istruzione e gli incentivi finanziari, per evitare che questo fenomeno si aggravi a livello mondiale. Uno dei primi grandi passi da compiere verso la parità di genere è sicuramente la comprensione del problema, ovvero riconoscere l'esistenza di un problema spesso risulta essere una parte importante della soluzione. Tuttavia, il lento restringimento del divario rende chiaro che in questo contesto debbano essere compiuti tentativi molto più dinamici. Ad esempio, investire in politiche per aiutare le donne a tornare al lavoro, soprattutto dopo la pandemia, potrebbe davvero fare la differenza. In altre parole, i governi hanno il potere di svolgere un ruolo significativo nell'accelerare il progresso verso la parità di genere, attraverso la legislazione,

le misure fiscali ma anche i partenariati pubblico-privato. Ad esempio, a Singapore, il tasso di partecipazione delle donne nella forza lavoro è effettivamente raddoppiato grazie all'attuazione di una serie di politiche che hanno consentito alle donne di raggiungere l'equilibrio tra lavoro e vita privata, compresi i congedi retribuiti e non retribuiti per l'infanzia, ma anche i congedi di maternità.

Un altro fattore che ha ottenuto un clamoroso successo in termini di uguaglianza di genere in tutto il mondo, e in particolare in America Latina, è stata l'istruzione, specialmente rispetto alla scuola primaria. La parità di opportunità nell'istruzione, infatti, riconosciuta nella Dichiarazione Universale dei Diritti Umani del 1948, così come nella Convenzione delle Nazioni Unite sull'Eliminazione di tutte le Forme di Discriminazione contro le Donne del 1979, viene spesso definita anche come “il grande equalizzatore”. Eppure, nonostante il progresso raggiunto, persistono differenze sistematiche di genere in diversi campi di studio, soprattutto nei Paesi in via di sviluppo.

Un ulteriore elemento chiave è l'investimento finanziario. Nel corso degli anni, gli incentivi finanziari per la parità di genere sono migliorati attraverso i bilanci nazionali, gli investimenti del settore privato ma anche attraverso i sistemi finanziari nazionali e internazionali. Dunque, gli investimenti pubblici hanno davvero il potere di cambiare le cose se accompagnati dalle giuste politiche, tuttavia il più delle volte è richiesta la cooperazione del settore pubblico e privato per effetti a lungo termine. Le disparità finanziarie esistenti tra donne e uomini in questo secolo rimangono una sfida cruciale, soprattutto nei Paesi in via di sviluppo e nonostante il ruolo svolto dagli SDG negli ultimi anni. A livello globale, infatti, quasi un miliardo di donne rimane al di fuori del sistema finanziario formale, il che implica che solo la metà delle donne al mondo partecipa alla forza lavoro, e di solito in lavori informali o in lavori che non le tutelano. A questo proposito, sono state avanzate diverse ipotesi per distruggere le barriere esistenti. Secondo la Banca Mondiale, tra queste rientrano sussidi e sovvenzioni, incentivi fiscali e incentivi agli appalti pubblici. Tuttavia, va ricordato che la loro efficienza ed efficacia dipendono dalla creazione di un ambiente *gender neutral*, dagli obiettivi politici mirati e dalle caratteristiche occupazionali.

Tutto sommato, è chiaro che il raggiungimento della piena parità di genere potrebbe essere solo un vantaggio per l'intera società, considerando che una maggiore parità di genere, tra l'altro, migliora la crescita economica. Dunque, il miglioramento della condizione delle donne, soprattutto nel mercato del lavoro, è il prerequisito per un'economia futura forte, sostenibile e ben adattata. Allo stesso modo, il fattore principale per sostenere la democrazia in futuro è l'adempimento dei diritti socioeconomici insieme ai diritti politici. In altre parole, la logica di costruire un sistema forte in termini di welfare, salute, istruzione e sicurezza sarebbe un passo fondamentale verso un pieno processo di democratizzazione. In fin dei conti, il ruolo dell'istruzione, delle politiche governative e degli investimenti finanziari sono soltanto alcuni fattori chiave a cui prestare attenzione per garantire un cambiamento culturale e sociale radicale in un mondo in cui gli stereotipi di genere non avranno più modo di esistere.