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# WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN THE AMERICAS:

**A Perspective from OAS  
Electoral Observation  
Missions (2017-2021)**

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GENERAL SECRETARIAT  
OF THE ORGANIZATION OF  
AMERICAN STATES (OAS)

SECRETARIAT  
FOR STRENGTHENING  
DEMOCRACY (SSD)

DEPARTMENT OF AND  
ELECTORAL COOPERATION  
OBSERVATION (DECO)



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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>I.</b> Introduction	5
<b>II.</b> Electoral Observation Missions as Promoters of Women's Political Participation in the Americas	11
<b>III.</b> Analysis of EOM Recommendations (2017-2021)	17
<b>IV.</b> Gender Equality: A Regional Perspective	24
1. Gender perspective in electoral bodies / 25	
2. Parity, quotas, and other affirmative actions / 27	
3. Political financing / 35	
4. Information and communication / 36	
5. Training / 39	
6. Gender-based political violence / 41	
7. Inclusion and/or empowerment in political parties and organizations / 43	
<b>V.</b> Conclusions	44
<b>VI.</b> Bibliography	47



# Introduction

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The countries of the Americas have a remarkable tradition of activism and advocacy for women’s rights. This tradition is evidenced through the signing and ratification of various binding international instruments and the assumption of other political commitments—such as the Inter-American Democratic Charter—that establish countries’ responsibility to work toward gender equality. Despite women comprising at least half of the population and electorates, their participation in representative bodies has historically been minimal. Although women’s right to vote has been recognized in the countries of the region since the first half of the twentieth century, women continue to be underrepresented at all levels.

The construction of a robust conceptual foundation and the dedicated efforts of numerous women’s groups in the political and civil society spheres have led to constitutional and legal reforms which have resulted in undeniable progress in the exercise of women’s political and electoral rights. It is therefore not surprising that the region continues to have the highest representation of women in national parliaments, according to data from the Inter-Parliamentary Union, with more than eight percentage points above the global average of 26.5%.<sup>1</sup>

However, the journey has not been easy or free of obstacles. From the early mechanisms designed to ensure the recognition of women’s human rights, such as the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM for its acronym in Spanish), and those that laid the necessary legal bases in the mid-twentieth-century, like the Commission on the Status of Women, to recent reforms that seek to guarantee the necessary conditions for the effective exercise of these rights, multilateral bodies have successfully created favorable spaces to guide efforts towards the eradication of discrimination and the active participation of women in all spheres of their lives.

In the political-electoral arena, the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) was a milestone, recognizing that discrimination not only violates the principles of equality and respect for human dignity, but also hinders women’s participation in their country’s political, social, economic, and cultural life on equal terms with men. In this regard, it called on countries to ensure that women have the right to vote and hold public office, among other obligations.<sup>2</sup>

At the regional level, a decisive step was taken in 1994 with the adoption of the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence

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<sup>1</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union. (2023). Women in Parliament in 2022. The year in review. Inter-Parliamentary Union. Available at: <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/reports/2023-03/women-in-parliament-2022>.

<sup>2</sup> Article 7 of CEDAW.

against Women, commonly known as the Belém do Pará Convention, during the twenty-fourth regular session of the General Assembly of the Organization of American States (OAS). The Convention established that every woman has the right to the recognition, enjoyment, exercise, and protection of all human rights and freedoms enshrined in regional and international human rights instruments, particularly the right to have equal access to public office in their country and to take part in the conduct of public affairs, including decision-making.<sup>3</sup>

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, acknowledged that traditional practices within political parties and government structures remained obstacles to women's participation in public life. It also recognized that discriminatory attitudes and practices, caregiving responsibilities, and the high cost of competing for and holding office continued to deter women from holding public office. Consequently, this document established among its objectives the elimination of all barriers to women's active participation in all spheres of public and private life, through their full and equal involvement in economic, social, cultural, and political decision-making processes.<sup>4</sup> The document also emphasized the exercise of power and decision-making as one of the twelve areas of special concern and urged governments and political parties to take appropriate measures to increase women's participation in decision-making roles.

In this way, the Inter-American system adopted principles that some countries were already beginning to promote through quota laws. For example, in 1990, Costa Rica enacted the Law on the Promotion of Social Equality for Women. This law requires political parties to include mechanisms in their statutes to promote women's participation in party election processes, in internal governing bodies, and elective offices. For its part, Argentina enacted the Quota Law in 1991, establishing a 30% quota for women candidates with a genuine chance of being elected. This quota applies to the preparation of political party lists of candidates for the National Parliament and the municipality of Buenos Aires.<sup>5</sup> Shortly after, other countries in the region enacted their own legislation with some type of quota. As a result, the region witnessed the most significant increase in women's political participation in its national parliaments, rising from 18.4% in 2003 to 24.8% in 2013. The widespread implementation of quotas drove this progress substantially, although the pace of change remained slow.<sup>6</sup>

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**3** Article 4 of the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women.

**4** Mission Statement. Chapter 1. Beijing Platform for Action.

**5** Báez Carlos, A. and García Méndez E. (2023). *Democracia paritaria: Avances y desafíos en la representación de las Mujeres*. [Parity democracy: Advances and challenges in the representation of women]. Instituto Nacional Electoral [National Electoral Institute], pp. 74-75. Mexico City, Mexico.

**6** *Idem*, p. 74.

The Quito Consensus, adopted during the Tenth session of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean in 2007, marked a significant shift in the conceptualization of women's political participation in the region. For the first time, it established gender parity as an objective for the region's democracies. The approved text recognized gender parity as a key driving force of democracy, aiming to achieve equality in the exercise of power and decision-making, in the mechanisms of social and political participation and representation.<sup>7</sup>

It was also agreed:

*"To adopt all necessary affirmative action measures and mechanisms, including the necessary legislative reforms and budgetary allocations, to ensure the full participation of women in public office and in political representative positions with a view to achieving parity in the institutional structure of the State (executive, legislative and judicial branches, as well as special and autonomous regimes) and at the national and local levels as an objective for Latin American and Caribbean democracies".<sup>8</sup>*

Thus, unlike quota systems, gender parity was adopted as a definitive measure that re-defined the concept of political power, establishing it as a space that should be shared equally between men and women.<sup>9</sup> In 2008, Ecuador became the first country in the region to incorporate parity in its constitutional text for the presentation of candidates. By 2013, six other countries had incorporated it into their electoral processes (Bolivia, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, and Mexico) and party regulations (Panama and Honduras).<sup>10</sup>

However, the regional discussion has shifted from descriptive or formal representation to the construction of parity democracies, where parity and substantive equality form the foundation of an inclusive State, and whose implementation and consolidation result from progression toward equitable relations in terms of gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic status, ensuring the equal enjoyment and exercise of rights.<sup>11</sup> Despite undeniable advances in women's political participation from a quantitative perspective, driven by the implementation of quota systems and parity, there are still structural

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<sup>7</sup> Commitment 17 of the Quito Consensus.

<sup>8</sup> Commitment 2 of the Quito Consensus.

<sup>9</sup> Llanos, B. (editor). (2013). *La apuesta por la paridad: Democratizando el sistema político en América Latina. Los casos de Ecuador, Bolivia y Costa Rica* [Banking on parity: The democratization of political systems in Latin America. The cases of Ecuador, Bolivia, and Costa Rica]. International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, and Inter-American Commission of Women. p. 22. Lima, Peru.

<sup>10</sup> Llanos, B. and Martínez, M. (editors). (2016). *La Democracia Paritaria en América Latina: Los casos de México y Nicaragua* [Democratic parity in Latin America: The cases of Mexico and Nicaragua]. Inter-American Commission of Women, p. 16. Washington, DC.

<sup>11</sup> UN Women and PARLATINO. (2013). Regulatory Framework to Consolidate Parity Democracy. Available at: <https://lac.unwomen.org/es/digiteca/publicaciones/2016/06/marco-paritario>.



barriers—or qualitative factors—that prevent or limit the full exercise of women’s political-electoral rights.

Violence against women who participate in politics is particularly significant. Parity democracy involves measuring parity, not only in quantitative terms but also in terms of equal conditions for the effective exercise of political rights. Therefore, eradicating this phenomenon is essential for achieving true parity.<sup>12</sup>

In this context, and based on various Inter-American legal instruments, including those mentioned above, the OAS recognizes that electoral processes are democratic to the extent that they are inclusive, clean, and competitive and that those elected to public office can exercise their roles.<sup>13</sup> The recommendations issued by Electoral Observation Missions (EOMs) on women’s political participation mainly aim to encourage member states to intensify their efforts to conduct electoral processes that directly and progressively provide equal opportunities for women and men to participate in politics.<sup>14</sup> Thus, in line with the proposal of the Inter-American Commission of Women to address this issue, two dimensions are considered: the access of women and men to State institutions and public office, and the conditions under which women can exercise their political rights free from discrimination and violence.<sup>15</sup>

This study analyzes the status of women’s political participation in the region, drawing on observations and recommendations issued by 49 EOMs deployed for the observation of electoral processes in 22 countries in the region, as reported in the thematic annexes of their reports since 2017. From that year onwards, each EOM report has included a detailed analysis that allows for a deeper understanding of the issues, including context, challenges, and additional observations on adopted recommendations.

This study is intended to provide member states, the electoral and academic communities, and the general public with a broad overview of the region’s progress between 2017 and 2021, along with insights into trends, best practices, and the evolution of issues from the perspective of EOMs.

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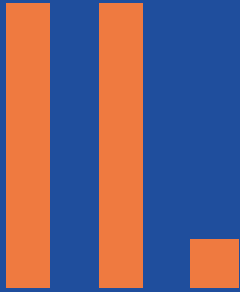
<sup>12</sup> Inter-American Commission of Women. Follow-up Mechanism of the Belém do Pará Convention (MESECVI for its acronym in Spanish). (2017). Inter-American Model Law on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence Against Women in Political Life. Inter-American Commission of Women. p. 16. Washington, DC.

<sup>13</sup> General Secretariat of the Organization of American States. (2008). Methods for Election Observation: A Manual for OAS Electoral Observation Missions. General Secretariat of the Organization of American States. p. 7. Washington, DC.

<sup>14</sup> Organization of American States. (2013). Manual for Incorporating a Gender Perspective into OAS Electoral Observation Missions (OAS/EOMs). General Secretariat of the Organization of American States. Washington, DC. Available at: [https://www.oas.org/es/sap/deco/pubs/manuales/Manual\\_gender\\_e.pdf](https://www.oas.org/es/sap/deco/pubs/manuales/Manual_gender_e.pdf).

<sup>15</sup> Llanos, B. and Martínez, M. *op.cit.* p. 21.

For the OAS, it is useful to have a resource that facilitates a regional analysis of women's political participation five years after the thematic reports were first published. Our goal is to share information that helps to identify challenges and to share progress, thereby supporting the continuous improvement of democratic systems in the region.



# Electoral Observation Missions as Promoters of Women's Political Participation in the Americas

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Since 1962, the OAS has deployed more than 320 Electoral Observation Missions (EOMs) in 28 countries in the Hemisphere.<sup>16</sup> These have served as an instrument of democratic consolidation to support the holding of periodic, free, and fair elections based on universal and secret suffrage as an expression of the sovereignty of the people.<sup>17</sup> Consequently, EOMs have offered valuable insights into each country's progress in consolidating democracy and have pinpointed areas that still require improvement.<sup>18</sup>

The findings and recommendations of these missions have particularly helped the Department of Electoral Cooperation and Observation (DECO) to develop projects that support the modernization of services provided by electoral bodies, while helping member states to gradually improve their electoral processes in a wide range of relevant areas, with a view to perfecting democratic systems.

Since 2017, the final reports of OAS/EOMs have included thematic annexes that elaborate on and deepen the findings of, and recommendations issued for each electoral process. In this study, the thematic annexes range from 2017 to 2021. This study offers a detailed assessment of 49 EOMs deployed for the observation of 38 electoral processes in 22 countries in the region, as indicated below (see **Table 1**):

**TABLE 1. Electoral processes analyzed in this study**

NUMBER	COUNTRY	ELECTION/S	YEAR
1	The Bahamas*	General	2017
2	Bolivia	Judicial Branch	2017
3	Ecuador*	General, referendum, and second round of presi-dential election	2017

**16** Member states where EOMs have not been deployed are Argentina, Barbados, Canada, Chile, Uruguay, and Trinidad and Tobago.

**17** General Secretariat of the Organization of American States. *op. cit.* p. 5.

**18** Organization of American States. (2018). *Misiones de Observación Electoral de la OEA: Recomendaciones y reformas* [OAS Electoral Observation Missions: Recommendations and reforms]. Organization of American States, Washington, DC.

NUMBER	COUNTRY	ELECTION/S	YEAR
4	Haiti*	General	2017
5	Honduras*	General	2017
6	Nicaragua*	Municipal	2017
7	Brazil*	General, first and second rounds	2018
8	Colombia	Presidential, first and second rounds	2018
9	Costa Rica	General, first and second rounds	2018
10	Ecuador	Popular consultation and referendum	2018
11	El Salvador*	Legislative and municipal	2018
12	Grenada	General	2018
13	Mexico*	Federal and local	2018
14	Paraguay*	General	2018
15	Peru*	Referendum	2018
16	Bolivia*	General	2019
17	Colombia*	Local authorities	2019
18	Dominica	General	2019
19	Ecuador*	Local, and Citizen Participation and Social Oversight Council	2019
20	El Salvador	Presidential	2019
21	Guatemala*	General and presidential election (second round)	2019
22	Panama*	General	2019
23	Bolivia*	General	2020

NUMBER	COUNTRY	ELECTION/S	YEAR
24	Brazil*	Municipal	2020
25	Costa Rica*	Municipal	2020
26	United States of America*	General	2020
27	Guyana*	General	2020
28	Peru*	Extraordinary Congressional election	2020
29	Dominican Republic*	Municipal; Elections for president, senators, and deputies	2020
30	Suriname*	General	2020
31	Ecuador*	General	2021
32	El Salvador*	Legislative and Municipal	2021
33	Honduras*	General	2021
34	Mexico*	Federal and local	2021
35	Paraguay*	Municipal	2021
36	Peru*	General and presidential (second round)	2021
37	Saint Lucia*	General	2021
38	The Bahamas*	General	2021

\*EOM with a specialist in women's political participation.

From 2017 to 2021, EOMs issued over 1,900 recommendations across eight categories:

- Organization
- Justice
- Technology

- Financing
- Women’s political participation
- Political participation of Indigenous peoples and Afro-descendants
- Campaigns and freedom of expression
- Electoral violence

In the specific case of women’s political participation, 80% of the electoral processes observed by the OAS (see **Table 1**) have included specialists in the field, who have brought their expertise to bear in the issuance of over 230 recommendations. See **Table 2** for the number of recommendations by country.

**TABLE 2. Distribution of EOM recommendations on women’s political participation by country**

COUNTRY	NUMBER OF RECOMMENDATIONS ISSUED
Bolivia	13
Brazil	12
Colombia	23
Costa Rica	13
Dominica	2
Dominican Republic	10
Ecuador	23
El Salvador	13
Grenada	2
Guatemala	9
Guyana	6

COUNTRY	NUMBER OF RECOMMENDATIONS ISSUED
Haiti	2
Honduras	12
Mexico	30
Nicaragua	7
Panama	6
Paraguay	15
Peru	16
Saint Lucia	8
Suriname	7
The Bahamas	8
United States of America	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>239</b>

It is important to note that this study only includes electoral cycles observed by the OAS between 2017 and 2021. Moreover, the number of observations for each country is not a reflection on the quality of the electoral system itself or the adequacy of the electoral framework for women’s political participation. These recommendations, primarily suggestions for specific improvements,<sup>19</sup> were issued based on direct electoral observations and the analysis of women’s political participation in specific electoral processes. They were also based on current legislation and information gathered from each country’s various institutional, political, and social actors.

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<sup>19</sup> General Secretariat of the Organization of American States. *op. cit.* p. 6.





# Analysis of EOM Recommendations (2017-2021)

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Between 2017 and 2021, EOMs issued 239 recommendations on women’s political participation, organized into eight categories as follows (see **Table 3**):<sup>20</sup>

**TABLE 3. Categories of EOM recommendations on women’s political participation (2017-2021)**

CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION
<b>Gender perspective in electoral bodies (administrative and/or jurisdictional)</b>	Regarding women’s participation in electoral bodies, including temporary electoral bodies; the establishment of entities dedicated to gender-related issues within electoral bodies; as well as the integration of a gender perspective in their tasks.
<b>Parity, quotas, and other affirmative actions</b>	Regarding affirmative action measures that establish the application of parity, quota policies, or other incentives to increase women’s participation in elective office.
<b>Political financing</b>	Regarding the distribution of public and private funding to women candidates, either directly or indirectly, including broadcast time as part of indirect funding. This category includes the distribution of internal resources to political parties.
<b>Information and communication</b>	Regarding the disclosure and communication of information from a gender perspective and the publication of information and participation data disaggregated by sex.
<b>Training</b>	Regarding training for the empowerment of citizens, members of electoral bodies, women candidates, and/or political leaders, or on the gender perspective.
<b>Political violence against women</b>	Measures relating to political violence—how to prevent, identify and classify it, including rules on political violence.

<sup>20</sup> Recommendations can be found in their corresponding reports, available at: <https://www.oas.org/eomdata-base/default.aspx?lang=es>

CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION
<b>Inclusion and/or empowerment in political parties and organizations</b>	Regarding measures for the promotion of women’s participation within political parties.
<b>Other</b>	Other recommendations on topics not mentioned above.

See **Table 4** for the distribution of EOM recommendations by category:

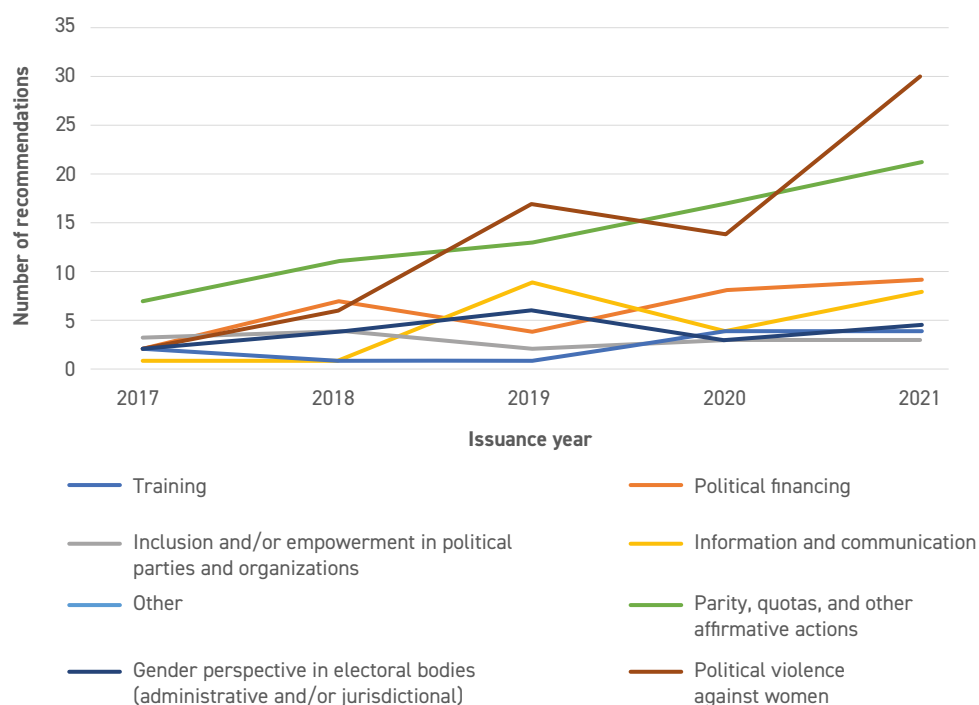
**TABLE 4.** Distribution of EOM recommendations on women’s political participation by category (2017-2021)

CATEGORY	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Gender perspective in electoral bodies (administrative and/or jurisdictional)	19	7.9
Parity, quotas, and other affirmative actions	69	28.9
Political financing	30	12.6
Information and communication	23	9.6
Training	12	5.0
Political violence against women	69	28.9
Inclusion and/or empowerment in political parties and organizations	15	6.3
Other	2	0.8
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>239</b>	<b>100</b>

It is important to note that 137 of these recommendations, approximately 57%, can be implemented without regulatory modifications. These practical suggestions facilitate implementation and are less constrained by the complexities of each country’s political dynamics.

By observing the distribution of these recommendations over time (see **Figure 1**), it is possible to identify a sustained increase in recommendations regarding the adoption of parity, quotas, and other affirmative actions. Similarly, recommendations related to political violence against women have shown a consistent increase. It should also be noted that the two aforementioned categories are those that concentrate the largest number of recommendations, both with 69 recommendations each; nearly 58% of the total.

**FIGURE 1. Distribution of EOM recommendations by category and by year**



Over time, advances have been made in different areas related to women’s access to candidacies and elective office. This has been possible as a result of the widespread implementation of **quota systems, affirmative actions**, and the adoption of **parity**. In this regard, a gradual pattern can be identified in the recommendations, suggesting the implementation of affirmative actions where they do not yet exist and, where they already exist, proposing new measures to ensure their effectiveness, expansion and/or for the transition to parity.

Out of the 69 recommendations in this category, 13 aim to establish quotas and/or adopt measures to make them effective. Additionally, nine recommendations propose moving toward parity and implementing mechanisms to make it effective, while 10 advocate for implementing parity and/or making it more effective, and, on eight occasions, the establishment or extension of horizontal parity was recommended. Other recommendations suggest specific mechanisms to enhance women's participation where gender quotas or parity already exist, such as, for example, establishing placement mandates to ensure equal outcomes (six), requiring resigning women candidates to be replaced by women candidates (six), implementing competitiveness blocs (one), and alternating candidates on lists (two). Two other recommendations emphasize the timely publication of candidate lists to ensure rule compliance information is available before election day. Other recommendations address the harmonization of regulations, the review of specific procedures adopted in particular countries, and other general mechanisms to ensure women's participation.

It is undeniable that women's participation has increased, as most countries in the region have adopted regulatory frameworks for affirmative actions and gender parity. This increase coincides with the rising phenomenon of **political violence** against women. In other words, the more women participate in politics, the more political violence they suffer.

The recommendations on political violence against women cover various areas. The most common recommendation, comprising approximately a third of the total, is the adoption of legal and regulatory frameworks to prevent, address, and eliminate it. Twelve recommendations suggest creating protocols and response mechanisms or evaluating and improving existing ones. Seven recommendations focus on guaranteeing protection measures and mechanisms for women.

Additionally, 11 recommendations focus on developing monitoring, information and statistical systems to document, follow up and address cases, as well as implementing communication campaigns and/or studies to raise awareness on the matter. Five recommendations emphasize training personnel responsible for intervention, investigation, or, if necessary, prosecution. The remaining recommendations target the phenomenon directly, including strengthening institutional capacities, inter-institutional collaboration, effective investigation, securing necessary resources, training to ensure access to justice and specific actions for political parties.

Moreover, other recommendations address the conditions under which women participate in electoral processes, which have seen undeniable progress. For instance, during the period under review, 12 recommendations were issued regarding **training** for the empowerment of citizens, members of electoral bodies, women candidates and/or political leaders, or on the gender perspective; as well as 30 recommendations regarding the access of **women candidates to political financing**.

In this last category, it is important to differentiate some topics. For example, ten recommendations aim to define and/or strengthen party financing for women candidates. At the same time, ten seek to guarantee this financing, not only during electoral processes but also on a permanent basis, ensuring women receive continuous training and leadership development. Regarding indirect financing, particularly media access, three recommendations focus on allocating and managing radio and television airtime, ensuring an equitable distribution between men and women candidates. Similarly, three recommendations suggest establishing or strengthening oversight systems and penalties for non-compliance with financing rules. The remaining recommendations in this category propose evaluating the effectiveness of financing for training, raising awareness among male party members, and standardizing related rules.

Beyond ensuring compliance with women’s political financing rules, effective penalty systems for non-compliance are essential to guarantee the success of any measure aimed at improving women’s competitive conditions. In this regard, it is worth highlighting 20 recommendations on the subject, which can be grouped into the following global categories of analysis (see **Table 5**).

**TABLE 5. Recommendations on penalties for non-compliance with gender rules, by scope of application**

SCOPE OF APPLICATION	NUMBER
Political financing	4
Inclusion and/or empowerment in political parties and organizations	2
Parity, quotas, and other affirmative actions	9
Political violence against women	5

The largest bloc of recommendations (nine) concern imposing penalties for non-compliance with rules on parity, quotas, and affirmative actions. They are followed by five recommendations addressing political violence against women.

However, it is impossible to speak of improving competitive conditions for women in politics without considering the practices of political parties, which are the primary vehicle for access to power. During the period of the study, 15 recommendations for **inclusion and/or empowerment in political parties and organizations** were issued.

These recommendations include establishing measures in the organizational sphere and equality rules in their incorporation documents (two); promoting participation and leadership in their decision-making bodies (five); monitoring and evaluating implemented measures (three); creating spaces for participation and training (three); and establishing a penalty system for non-compliance with norms (two).

Two other categories focus on the electoral bodies' organization and activities. For example, during the period under review, 19 recommendations were issued concerning the incorporation of a **gender perspective in administrative and/or jurisdictional electoral bodies**. Nine of these recommendations suggest creating or strengthening internal bodies for gender equality; two recommendations aim to implement gender parity within the bodies; two promote intra and inter-institutional collaboration to implement equality policies; two focus on implementing mechanisms to facilitate the voting process for specific groups, as well as two others for their excuse of acting as members of the table (pregnant and lactating women); and one recommends implementing an online system for the registration of candidacies.

Additionally, 23 recommendations have been issued regarding the disclosure of **information and communication** from a gender perspective, as well as the publication of information and sex-disaggregated data. Specifically, 12 of these recommendations suggested the timely publication of sex-disaggregated data related to candidacies, the voter roll, election results, and participation as poll workers, among others, to highlight gender issues, promote transparency in the process, and guide decision-making to improve women's political participation. Five other recommendations focus on conducting evaluations, studies, and conferences to analyze this data from a gender perspective, enabling the implementation and improvement of equality policies. Other recommendations address the regulatory information on the authorities' websites (one); the dissemination of this information among women candidates (one); the publication of candidates' names on the lists (one); the development of awareness campaigns on inclusion (one); and others (two).

# IV.

## Gender Equality: A Regional Perspective







EOM reports between 2017 and 2021 allow for a regional assessment of the evolution and trends in gender equality based on the experiences of these 22 countries. The purpose is to identify trends in the main elements influencing the advancement of women's political participation, highlighting good practices and recommendations from the OAS, and the various elements that may shape future development of this subject. Although not exhaustive, each section includes examples of different countries' experiences to help readers better understand the issues under analysis in this study.

## 1. Gender perspective in electoral bodies

In the region, establishing parity criteria for the composition of electoral authorities is uncommon. However, the following cases stand out. They were identified during EOM deployments and can be considered good practices.

**TABLE 6. Countries with some regulation for women's participation in electoral bodies**

COUNTRY	PROVISION
<b>Bolivia</b>	Law 18 of the Plurinational Electoral Body (2010) establishes the system for appointing members of the Supreme Electoral Court and the Departmental Electoral Courts, ensuring gender equity.
<b>Ecuador</b>	The Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador and the Code of Democracy establish that the National Electoral Council (CNE for its Spanish acronym) and the Electoral Disputes Tribunal (TCE for its Spanish acronym) must have a gender-balanced composition.

COUNTRY	PROVISION
<b>Mexico</b>	The Political Constitution of the United Mexican States establishes gender parity in the three State branches, autonomous bodies, and state and municipal governments, including electoral bodies. Similarly, the General Law on Electoral Institutions and Procedures states that the principle of gender parity must be observed in the composition of the General Council of the National Electoral Institute.

Additionally, various countries have established gender-related agencies or units to strengthen related public policies. EOMs have recommended their implementation in several cases. In countries where they already exist, it has been advised that these units be provided with a sufficient budget to adequately fulfill their mandate.

**TABLE 7. Countries with a gender-related unit/agency within the electoral body**

Bolivia
Brazil
Costa Rica
Dominican Republic
El Salvador
Guatemala
Mexico
Panama
Paraguay

Lastly, beyond women’s participation in decision-making spaces within electoral bodies and entities monitoring the implementation of gender equality policies and pro-

grams, some countries have approved provisions to incorporate a gender perspective in electoral functions and the fulfillment of the responsibilities of their electoral bodies.

**TABLE 8. Countries that have implemented regulations to incorporate a gender perspective into their activities**

COUNTRY	PROVISION
<b>Bolivia</b>	Law 18 of the Plurinational Electoral Body (2010) establishes that it “assumes and promotes gender equity and equal opportunities between women and men for the exercise of their individual and collective rights.”
<b>Mexico</b>	The General Law on Electoral Institutions and Procedures establishes that all activities of the National Electoral Institute must be conducted with a gender perspective.

## 2. Parity, quotas, and other affirmative actions

Women’s participation in electoral processes has evolved exponentially in the past decades. However, until recently, women’s representation in elective office has not mirrored their actual participation in society.

In Western democracies, the underrepresentation of women in different areas, including political representation, has been addressed, among other measures, through affirmative actions. These consist of mechanisms that recognize not all people enjoy truly equal starting conditions. Affirmative actions seek to remedy these initial difficulties by compensating for disadvantages resulting from customs, habits, perceptions, and roles historically assigned to women.<sup>21</sup>

Gender quotas, in particular, are affirmative action policies (also known as positive discrimination) introduced temporarily to redress the conditions of inequality that women have historically experienced.<sup>22</sup> This type of measure ensures that women, whose par-

<sup>21</sup> Llanos, B. *op. cit.* p. 22.

<sup>22</sup> Báez Carlos, A. and García Méndez E. *op. cit.* pp. 67-68.

ticipation in elective office has traditionally been lower than that of men, have access to a minimum percentage of candidacies for various elective offices. Thus, considering the multifactorial conditions that prevent women from competing on equal terms, measures are established to ensure that political parties include a minimum percentage of women on their candidate lists. Other quota systems may extend beyond candidate lists to include the composition of representative bodies.

Other countries have moved toward incorporating gender parity, which seeks equal participation between women and men in politics. Both parity and quota systems reflect specific conditions in each member state, including cultural and social barriers, methods for filling vacancies in elective offices, the political system, the democratic culture, among others, which help to explain the evolution of women’s participation in politics.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, it is impossible to identify universally successful formulas, as each case must be considered individually.<sup>24</sup>

#### a. Quotas

The main mechanisms used in the region are discussed below.

1. **Intra-party quotas.** This modality implies the inclusion of a minimum number of women on candidate lists for the internal elections of political parties. It should be noted that an increase in women’s participation in these internal processes does not necessarily lead to a higher nomination of candidates in electoral processes. See **Table 9** for examples of intra-party quotas in the region.

**TABLE 9.** Examples of intra-party quotas implemented by countries in the region

COUNTRY	EXAMPLE
Paraguay	20% quota for candidates in internal elections of political parties.
Panama (2012)	50% quota for women candidates in internal elections of political parties.

<sup>23</sup> These same elements may explain the absence of measures such as quotas and gender parity systems in Dominica, Grenada, Guatemala, Saint Lucia, and the United States of America.

<sup>24</sup> In Suriname (2020), for example, women candidates represented 47% of the total despite the absence of a quota system.

2. **Electoral quotas.** These quotas require political parties to nominate a certain percentage of women on their candidate lists for constitutional elections, in which citizens decide who will hold elective office based on party choices. See **Table 10** for examples.

**TABLE 10. Examples of electoral quotas implemented by countries in the region**

COUNTRY	EXAMPLE
<b>Brazil</b>	30% quota for candidates in a proportional representation system.
<b>Dominican Republic</b>	40% quota for legislative candidates (deputies).
<b>Dominican Republic</b>	40% quota for subnational candidates.
<b>El Salvador</b>	30% quota for Legislative elections.
<b>El Salvador</b>	30% quota for Parlantino (Latin American Parliament).
<b>Guyana</b>	A quota of one-third for candidates for the National Legislature.

3. **Partial quotas.** Political parties are required to apply this type of quota for a certain number of districts or constituencies/regions. In other words, it is not applied across the board. In some cases, EOMs have recommended extending this type of quota to make it universal.

**TABLE 11. Examples of partial quotas implemented by countries in the region**

COUNTRY	EXAMPLE
<b>Colombia</b>	30% quota on party lists for a certain number of constituencies.
<b>Guyana</b>	A quota of one woman candidate on 80% of regional lists, applicable only at the national level.

## b. Parity

Unlike quotas, which are by definition temporary and proportional, the principle of parity is based on the equality of men and women and, therefore, establishes rules to ensure this equality permanently. As Llanos (2013) points out, this concept goes beyond *ad hoc* measures to modify the notion of political power as a space that should be shared equally by men and women.<sup>25</sup> It should be noted that, in many cases, OAS/EOMs have recommended including measures to move progressively toward parity to promote women's equal representation.

1. **Vertical parity.** For electoral purposes, vertical parity ensures that candidate lists are equally composed: 50% women and 50% men. Additional specific quotas may accompany this principle.

This modality has been adopted in Bolivia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Peru. In all cases under analysis, parity is accompanied by gender alternation on candidate lists, meaning candidates of each gender alternate from top to bottom. In Honduras, however, parity between women and men was established on candidate lists for the 2017 primaries.

2. **Horizontal parity.** This ensures the parity principle in multiple elections at the same level of government or position, such as governorships, departmental or congressional seats (deputies). However, this is not applicable in single-member systems, especially when it comes to Executive branch offices at different levels of government. In various cases, OAS/EOMs have recommended adopting horizontal quota mechanisms, including ranking on multi-member lists, and extending the application of such mechanisms to all levels of government.

This mechanism is applied in Bolivia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, and Mexico. It is worth noting that Costa Rica, Ecuador, and Mexico have adopted or extended its application following OAS/EOM recommendations.

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<sup>25</sup> Llanos, B. (editor). (2013). *La apuesta por la paridad: Democratizando el sistema político en América Latina. Los casos de Ecuador, Bolivia y Costa Rica* [Banking on parity: The Democratization of Political Systems in Latin America. The cases of Ecuador, Bolivia, and Costa Rica]. International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, and Inter-American Commission of Women. p. 22. Lima, Peru. (op. cit supra 9).

**TABLE 12.** Types of affirmative actions identified in the countries in this study<sup>26</sup>

<b>COUNTRY</b>	<b>TYPE OF AFFIRMATIVE ACTION</b>	<b>REQUIRED PERCENTAGE AND OFFICES WHERE IT APPLIES</b>	<b>YEAR OF ADOPTION</b>
<b>Bolivia</b>	Parity	Vertical parity, accompanied by gender alternation from top to bottom on candidate lists.	2004
<b>Brazil</b>	Quota	30% for proportional representation candidacies.	2018
<b>Colombia</b>	Quota	30% on party lists, exclusively in the most populated departments.	2011
<b>Costa Rica</b>	Parity	Vertical parity, accompanied by gender alternation from top to bottom on candidate lists.	2009
<b>Dominican Republic</b>	Quota	40% for candidates to deputy seats, municipal councilors, and members of boards.	2020
<b>Ecuador</b>	Parity	Vertical parity, accompanied by gender alternation from top to bottom on candidate lists.	2009
<b>El Salvador</b>	Quota	30% for elections to the Legislative Branch, the Latin American Parliament, and municipal councils.	2013
<b>Guyana</b>	Quota	One-third of the candidates to the National Assembly. A woman candidate on 80% of candidate lists per constituency.	2000

<sup>26</sup> The measures adopted by the countries listed in the table apply only until 2021, the period covered by this study.

COUNTRY	TYPE OF AFFIRMATIVE ACTION	REQUIRED PERCENTAGE AND OFFICES WHERE IT APPLIES	YEAR OF ADOPTION
<b>Mexico</b>	Parity	Gender parity on the candidate lists for Legislative elections (majority system).	2014
		Gender parity will be accompanied by a competitiveness criterion in candidacies for the Lower House in majority systems.	
		Vertical parity, accompanied by gender alternation from top to bottom on candidate lists for Legislative elections (proportional representation system).	
		Horizontal parity at the local level among the various municipalities that make up the subnational entities.	2015
		Horizontal parity in candidates leading the five lists (proportional representation system).	2020
		Horizontal parity in candidacies for subnational executive powers, considering the total number of offices to be renewed in a given year.	2021
<b>Nicaragua</b>	Parity	Parity for all elected bodies and positions except for the Presidency and Vice-Presidency of the Republic.	2014
		Vertical parity on the candidate lists for deputies to the National Assembly, the Central American Parliament, municipal and regional councils, accompanied by gender alternation from top to bottom on candidate lists.	
<b>Panama</b>	Quota	50% in internal elections of political parties.	2012
<b>Paraguay</b>	Quota	20% in internal elections of political parties and movements.	1996
<b>Peru</b>	Parity	Parity at all electoral levels, including the presidential elections and the Andean Parliament, accompanied by gender alternation from top to bottom on candidate lists.	2020



### c. Other measures to strengthen women’s political participation in the region

See below for an explanation of some measures applicable to either a quota or parity-based system.

- 1. Penalties.** OAS/EOM reports show that implementing a quota or gender parity-based system is most effective when accompanied by penalties for non-compliance. Effective measures include imposing indisputable penalties for non-compliance and establishing placement mandates—especially alternation—to ensure women are ranked in eligible positions. This is particularly important when lists are closed and blocked, but also when they are closed, unblocked, and open to give equal visibility to men and women candidates.<sup>27</sup> In addition, EOMs have recommended that electoral bodies be equipped with effective tools and sufficient resources to thoroughly monitor compliance with measures favoring women.

In general, countries have opted for solutions such as refusing to register entire candidate lists in the event of non-compliance or reducing the number of men candidates until compliance is achieved.

See **Table 13** for the four penalty mechanisms identified in the region.

**TABLE 13. Penalties for non-compliance with affirmative actions identified in the region**

<b>COUNTRY/ COUNTRIES</b>	<b>MEASURE OR PENALTY FOR NON-COMPLIANCE WITH AFFIRMATIVE ACTION</b>
<b>Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, and Haiti</b>	Refusal to register candidates.
<b>El Salvador</b>	Fine of 15 to 55 minimum monthly wages.
<b>Guyana</b>	Tickets are returned for correction.
<b>Mexico</b>	The number of men candidates is reduced until gender parity is achieved.

<sup>27</sup> Llanos, B. y Martínez, M. *op.cit.* p. 26.

2. **Lead and substitute candidates of the same gender.** Measures have been taken to prevent women candidates from resigning and having their elective offices filled by men registered as substitute candidates. In Mexico, for example, tickets must consist of lead and substitute candidates of the same gender, ensuring the effective application of this measure.
3. **Same-gender replacement.** In other instances, when women withdraw their candidacies, men are registered as their replacements. Various EOMs have recommended that if a woman candidate resigns after being elected, another woman should replace her.

**TABLE 14. Measures identified in the region to address cases of resigning women**

COUNTRY/ COUNTRIES	MEASURE OR PENALTY FOR NON-COMPLIANCE WITH AFFIRMATIVE ACTION
Bolivia, Colombia, and Mexico	Replacements must be of the same gender.
Dominican Republic	If a woman candidate resigns, the ratio of men to women candidates must be maintained at 40-60.

4. **Alternation.** This is the mechanism by which men and women candidates are sequentially placed on lists to ensure equally gendered tickets are elected. It is also known as “zipper” and is used in Costa Rica, Ecuador, Mexico, and Nicaragua.
5. **Placement mandate.** This type of mechanism requires political parties to place women candidates in a specific order of precedence to ensure they are not placed in seats with a low probability of being elected. This can be achieved by creating competitiveness blocs to ensure the nomination of women in positions where they have a real chance of winning, and by implementing rules to prevent quotas from being filled predominantly by placing women in substitute positions.
6. **Positive incentives.** Quota implementation can be accompanied by additional measures that provide positive incentives for compliance. This type of mechanism aims to create non-mandatory measures that still yield positive externalities for adherents. In Haiti, for example, a 40% discount on registration fees was approved for those who meet quota requirements.

It should be noted that despite the existence of these mechanisms in many countries, legal provisions or systems still undermine their effectiveness in some cases. For example, legislation may provide exceptions to the application of quotas in situations such as party primaries or in the absence of women's participation. Several EOMs have recommended eliminating exception systems to ensure the effectiveness of affirmative action measures. Conversely, results may be distorted in preferential voting systems if voters can select candidates from party lists based on their preferences, even though the lists have been compiled based on gender parity. In this sense, adopting a double preferential vote has been recommended so that voters can select a man and a woman from the list.

It should be noted that the effective application of parity rules is also conditioned by the electoral system, particularly by the size of the constituency (favored by large districts), the type of list (favored by the option of closed and blocked lists as opposed to unblocked or open lists), and the electoral system (favored by a proportional representation system that would lead to the election of more women).<sup>28</sup>

### 3. Political financing

It is common for political party financing to be unequally distributed between men and women candidates. To address this situation, various regulations have been enacted to encourage or require political parties to ensure a more equitable distribution. EOMs have made numerous observations and recommendations, including equal media access for women candidates. This is in addition to the good practices implemented by member states. See **Table 15** for some examples.

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<sup>28</sup> Llanos, B. y Martínez, M. *op.cit.* p. 34.

**TABLE 15. Examples of good practices implemented to encourage equal financing for men and women candidates**

COUNTRY/ COUNTRIES	EXAMPLE
<b>Bolivia</b>	The law provides for a public funding quota for campaigns of women candidates in general elections.
<b>Brazil</b>	The electoral authority mandated that at least 30% of political party financing be allocated to women candidates.
<b>Colombia</b>	A system of financial incentives was approved for political parties with elected women candidates.
<b>Mexico</b>	At the federal level, it was established that political parties should allocate at least 40% of their public campaign funding to women candidates.
<b>Peru</b>	A regulation was approved to ensure that men and women candidates receive equal treatment and prominence in broadcasting time.
<b>Brazil, Bolivia, Mexico, and Peru</b>	Additional measures to regular financing have been approved to ensure equal access to the media.

## 4. Information and communication

Disaggregated information is essential for conducting diagnoses and evaluations, as it distinguishes the differences between various indicators by sex. This applies to various categories of information such as candidacies, party membership, voter rolls, voter turnout, electoral staff, poll workers, etc. This approach certainly highlights gender-related issues and promotes transparency in the process. Furthermore, it is essential for designing gender equality policies, assessing women’s participation in electoral processes, and discussing and promoting quotas and parity in legislative bodies.

See **Table 16** for examples of the type of information collected and disseminated by electoral authorities, disaggregated by sex, as reported by EOMs:

**TABLE 16.** Examples of type of information collected and disseminated by electoral authorities disaggregated by sex

COUNTRY	EXAMPLES
<b>Bolivia</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Candidacies</li> <li>• Voter turnout and abstention</li> <li>• Participation as poll workers</li> <li>• Party membership</li> <li>• Participation in national or executive bodies of political parties</li> </ul>
<b>Colombia</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Candidacies</li> <li>• Participation as poll workers</li> <li>• Participation in election oversight</li> </ul>
<b>Costa Rica</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Candidacies</li> <li>• Voter roll</li> </ul>
<b>Dominica</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Candidacies</li> </ul>
<b>Dominican Republic</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Candidacies</li> <li>• Voter roll</li> <li>• Participation in electoral colleges</li> </ul>
<b>Ecuador<sup>29</sup></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Candidacies</li> <li>• Voter roll</li> <li>• Voter turnout</li> <li>• Participation as poll workers</li> </ul>

<sup>29</sup> This information will be published after election day.

<b>El Salvador</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Candidacies</li> <li>• Voter roll</li> <li>• Voter turnout</li> <li>• Participation as poll workers</li> </ul>
<b>Grenada</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Candidacies</li> </ul>
<b>Guatemala</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Voter roll</li> <li>• Participation in subnational electoral bodies</li> </ul>
<b>Guyana</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Candidacies</li> </ul>
<b>Haiti</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Candidacies</li> <li>• Participation as poll workers</li> </ul>
<b>Honduras</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Candidacies</li> </ul>
<b>Mexico</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Candidacies</li> <li>• Voter roll</li> <li>• Lists of individuals affiliated with political parties and their governing bodies</li> <li>• National registry of individuals penalized for gender-based political violence against women</li> <li>• Voter turnout</li> </ul>
<b>Nicaragua</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Candidacies</li> <li>• Voter roll</li> <li>• Participation in departmental and regional electoral councils</li> <li>• Participation in election oversight</li> </ul>

<b>Panama</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Candidacies</li> <li>• Voter roll</li> <li>• Participation as poll workers</li> <li>• Participation in election oversight</li> </ul>
<b>Paraguay</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Candidacies</li> <li>• Voter roll</li> </ul>
<b>Peru</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Candidacies</li> <li>• Voter roll</li> <li>• Participation as poll workers</li> </ul>
<b>Saint Lucia</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Candidacies</li> </ul>
<b>Suriname</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Voter roll</li> </ul>

## 5. Training

Measures have been taken in various cases to ensure women's training, which aims to reverse the existing conditions of inequality for women in the public sphere. EOMs have included this issue in thematic reports and recommended establishing rules to allocate minimum quotas to promote women's participation and training.

See **Table 17** for examples of some highlighted good practices.

**TABLE 17. Regulatory provisions to ensure women’s political training**

COUNTRY	REGULATORY PROVISION IDENTIFIED
<b>Colombia</b>	Law 1475 (2011) mandates that political parties and movements allocate at least 15% of their annual budgets to think tank activities, political and electoral education and training courses, and the effective inclusion of young people, women, and ethnic minorities in the political process.
<b>Costa Rica</b>	The Electoral Code requires political parties to equally allocate public funds to finance training activities. Compliance with this provision requires submitting a certificate issued by a certified accountant, ensuring that funds have been allocated equally to train both men and women. Without such a certificate, the authority will not approve reimbursing expenditure.
<b>Ecuador</b>	In line with OAS recommendations from 2017 and 2019, 20% of public funding allocated by political parties for training must be directed toward the political training of affiliates, with a focus on priority groups: women and young people.
<b>Mexico</b>	The General Law on Political Parties mandates a minimum expenditure of 3% of ordinary public funding of political parties on women’s education, training, leadership, and political empowerment.
<b>Panama</b>	The Electoral Code stipulates that political parties must allocate at least 50% of their annual vote-based contributions to civic education activities. At least 20% of this amount must be assigned to developing activities exclusively for women’s training.
<b>Peru</b>	Law 31046 introduced reforms to the public funding system, mandating that at least 50% of direct public funding be dedicated to education, training, research, and dissemination activities, adhering to the criteria of equality, parity, and non-discrimination between men and women.



## 6.

### Gender-based political violence

One of the primary barriers to women’s participation in the public sphere is the violence they encounter within political and electoral processes. Although this phenomenon is not new, it has only recently gained visibility in the electoral arena. Violence against women in political life has been defined in the Inter-American system as “any action, conduct or omission, carried out directly or through third parties that, based on their gender, cause harm or suffering to a woman or to various women, which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women of their political rights. Violence against women in political life may include, among others, physical, sexual, psychological, moral, economic, or symbolic violence”.<sup>30</sup> OAS/EOM recommendations highlight the Inter-American Model Law on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women in Political Life as a guide.

The issue itself is of the utmost importance. However, a cause-and-effect relationship has been observed with other previously addressed elements, that makes it particularly serious. For instance, the underrepresentation of women is a reflection of the discrimination they face in the political arena, and violence against them is one of its most extreme manifestations. In this regard, the Declaration on Violence and Political Harassment against Women (2015) of the Sixth Conference of States Parties of the Belém do Pará Convention established that violence has become more visible due to the increased political participation of women, especially as political representatives. This, in turn, results from the implementation of gender and parity quotas. In other words, as women’s political participation has increased, forms of discrimination and violence against them have intensified.<sup>31</sup>

In some cases, progress has been made in adopting laws and policies specifically addressing gender-based violence in political-electoral contexts (see **Table 18**).

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**30** Article 3 of the Inter-American Model Law on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women in Political Life.

**31** Inter-American Commission of Women. Follow-up Mechanism to the Belém do Pará Convention (MESECVI). *op. cit.* p. 12.

**TABLE 18. Countries with laws and/or policies addressing political gender-based violence**

COUNTRY	LAW AND/OR POLICY
<b>Bolivia</b>	Law 243/2012. Law against Political Harassment and Violence against Women. It defines the concepts of political harassment and political gender-based violence and establishes four channels for filing complaints: a) administrative, b) criminal, c) constitutional, d) electoral.
<b>Ecuador</b>	Articles 61, 70, 279, 280, and 282 of the Democracy Code. They exemplify political gender-based violence, categorizing it as a very serious offense. The Code also defines the Electoral Disputes Tribunal (TCE for its acronym in Spanish) as the body responsible for addressing and punishing these offenses.
<b>El Salvador</b>	The Special Comprehensive Law for a Life Free of Violence for Women. It defines political violence against women and details the responsibilities of various institutions in this area, including the Supreme Electoral Tribunal, the Salvadoran Institute for the Advancement of Women (ISDEMU for its acronym in Spanish), municipal councils, the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare, and the Salvadoran Institute for Cooperative Development.
<b>Mexico</b>	General Law on Women's Access to a Life Free of Violence; General Law on Electoral Institutions and Procedures; General Law on the Electoral Disputes System; General Law on Political Parties; General Law on Electoral Offenses; Organic Law of the Office of the Attorney General of the Republic; Organic Law of the Federal Judiciary; and General Law on Administrative Responsibilities. These laws define gender-based violence against women, establish prevention, punishment and compensation measures, identify the bodies authorized to act and their competencies in the matter, as well as the obligations of political parties to eliminate it. On the other hand, violence against women is classified as a crime and it is punishable in the electoral, criminal, and administrative orders.
<b>Peru</b>	Law 31155. It establishes mechanisms to prevent and punish harassment against women in political life.

EOMs have recommended that relevant actors be provided with the necessary resources to fulfill their legal responsibilities and establish protocols to standardize criteria, concepts, and procedures.

## 7.

# Inclusion and/or empowerment in political parties and organizations

The characteristics of the party system and its internal culture influence the overall performance of the electoral system. In this regard, EOMs have highlighted in their observations and recommendations the importance of political parties adopting internal measures to enhance women’s participation, such as establishing a women’s secretariat or an equivalent body. In some cases, quotas and gender parity have been also applied to the composition of political party governing bodies. See **Table 19** for examples of some good practices.

**TABLE 19. Good practices identified to enhance women’s participation in political parties and organizations**

COUNTRY	GOOD PRACTICES
<b>Costa Rica</b>	The Electoral Code establishes the principles of equality, non-discrimination, and parity in political party structures.
<b>Dominican Republic</b>	Law 33-18 on Political Parties, Groups, and Movements establishes a 40% gender quota for political party governing bodies.
<b>Ecuador</b>	The principles of parity, alternation, and sequentiality are extended within political parties as a constitutional obligation.
<b>El Salvador</b>	The Law of Political Parties mandates that statutes must specify procedures to promote the participation of women and young people in governing bodies and candidacies for elective office. It also establishes that political parties must hold internal elections by free, direct, equal, and secret ballot of their members or affiliates to elect party authorities and select candidates for elective office.
<b>Mexico</b>	The General Law on Political Parties establishes the obligation to constitute the internal bodies of political parties on a gender parity basis.
<b>Panama</b>	Political parties are required to have a Women’s Secretariat or an equivalent body.



## Conclusions

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Undeniably, progress has been made throughout the long and arduous journey to guarantee the effective exercise of women's political rights. Over the past thirty years, this progress has led the region to achieve the highest representation of women in national parliaments.<sup>32</sup> Women's political participation has significantly increased due to the widespread implementation of quotas aligned with international commitments on women's human rights and the gradual adoption of gender parity.

However, structural barriers continue to limit the full exercise of women's political-electoral rights. This issue has been noted in OAS/EOM reports, particularly since 2017, when thematic annexes were developed. These documents offer a more comprehensive and detailed analysis of the systems observed. They support the observations and recommendations issued with a view to building true parity democracies—democracies that ensure equal conditions for effectively exercising women's political rights. In this context, the information in the thematic annexes of EOM reports regarding women's political participation shows that there is still a long way to go.

Fifteen of the 22 countries in this study already have some kind of measure in their legislation to ensure women's inclusion on the candidate lists for representative bodies. Seven of these have parity. The standard recommended by EOMs is therefore a gradual transition toward parity, starting with formal or quantitative measures. However, moving beyond the discussion on the implementation of quotas or affirmative actions does not mean abandoning the regional debate over their implementation. The construction of parity democracies requires creating qualitative conditions for the effective exercise of rights. In this regard, adopting second-generation affirmative actions, such as those implemented in direct and indirect political funding, is currently under discussion.

In Latin America, nearly all countries have public funding systems for political parties and electoral campaigns, aiming to enhance the democratic quality of their political systems. Nevertheless, the rules governing these systems have not been accompanied by measures to ensure an equitable distribution of resources. If these public resources do not reach women, they fail to fulfill their democratic function.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> According to data from the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

<sup>33</sup> Inter-American Commission of Women. (2022). *¿Dónde está el dinero para las campañas electorales de las mujeres? [Where is the money for women's electoral campaigns?]*. Inter-American Commission of Women. Washington, DC. p. 7

Hence, the recommendations to ensure an equitable or parity distribution of campaign resources are perceived as the greatest obstacle to effective political participation.<sup>34</sup>

Conversely, the rise in political violence against women, a direct consequence of their increased formal participation due to the implementation of quota and parity systems, explains the continued increase in recommendations to member states in this area. This issue remains one of the most significant matters pending on the regional agenda. While some countries have made promising progress in this area, numerous challenges remain to eradicate this phenomenon. EOMs must continue to prioritize this issue, as its eradication is essential for achieving gender parity. This will also require the development of studies and evaluations of existing systems. However, the differing conceptualizations of political violence against women adopted by various countries undeniably complicate comparative analyses on the issue. In any case, efforts to promote the adoption of the Inter-American Model Law on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women in Political Life will be essential. It is worth noting that political parties, along with social media, are currently the primary platforms where expressions of violence against women in their political lives are articulated.<sup>35</sup> In this context, EOMs should closely examine the realities within these spaces during each observed electoral process.

Finally, greater emphasis should be placed on promoting the implementation of a gender perspective in the work of electoral bodies. Despite being one of the categories with the lowest number of recommendations (less than 8%), promoting women's participation in all decision-making spaces will inevitably play a unique role in these areas. The transition to a parity democracy requires organizing electoral processes with a gender perspective.

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<sup>34</sup> *Idem*, p. 4

<sup>35</sup> Albaine, Laura. (2021). *Violencia contra las mujeres en política: hoja de ruta para prevenirla, monitorearla, sancionarla y erradicarla* [Violence against women in politics: a roadmap to prevent, monitor, punish, and eradicate it]. United Nations Development Programme, UN Women, and International IDEA. p. 41

VI.

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