

**GENDER, POLITICAL REPRESENTATION AND PROCESSES FOR
PROHIBITION OF WOMEN IN BRAZIL¹****GÊNERO, REPRESENTAÇÃO POLÍTICA E OS PROCESSOS DE INTERDIÇÃO
DAS MULHERES NO BRASIL*****GÉNERO, REPRESENTACIÓN POLÍTICA Y PROCESOS DE PROHIBICIÓN DE LAS
MUJERES EN BRASIL***

Maria Mary FERREIRA²
e-mail: mm.ferreira@ufma.com

How to reference this paper:

FERREIRA, M. M. Gender, political representation and processes for prohibition of women in Brazil. **Rev. Cadernos de Campo**, Araraquara, v. 23, n. esp. 2, e023015, 2023. e-ISSN: 2359-2419. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47284/cdc.v23iesp.2.17005>



| **Submitted:** 21/07/2022
| **Revisions required:** 06/06/2023
| **Approved:** 30/09/2023
| **Published:** 23/12/2023

Editors: Prof. PhD. Maria Teresa Miceli Kerbauy
Prof. Me. Mateus Tobias Vieira
Prof. Me. Thaís Caetano de Souza

¹ This study is part of research conducted by the researcher since 1998, further elaborated in the books *Os Bastidores da Tribuna: mulher, política e poder no Maranhão* (2010) and *Mulheres, protagonismos e sub-representação*, (2019). Both were funded by the Foundation for Research and Scientific and Technological Development of Maranhão – FAPEMA.

² University Federal of Maranhão (UFMA), São Luís – MA – Brazil. Associate Professor in the Graduate Program in Public Policies and the Department of Library Science at the Federal University of Maranhão. Doctoral degree in Sociology from Unesp/FCLAr and completed postdoctoral studies in Communication and Information at the University of Porto, Portugal.

ABSTRACT: The underrepresentation of women in elected positions points to an unconsolidated democracy. The 17% female representation in the Federal Chamber portrays the Brazilian State's difficulties in raising the levels of female presence, even considering the quota policy. Such difficulties are explained by the patriarchal culture that pervades social organizations and political institutions, including parties and unions. When comparing Brazil with other nations on the same continent, it is observed that countries such as Argentina, Bolivia, and Costa Rica have reached similar levels to those in Europe. The recent coup that removed Dilma Rousseff from the president of the country shows that in Brazil, conservatism, patriarchy, and misogyny have been renewed in political relations, supported by the media, the judiciary sectors, and the fundamentalist benches in Congress. A fact that has contributed to intensifying further also gender and class inequalities. This text presents reflections constructed based on studies and research developed in the last two decades (2010, 2015, 2019), enriched by dialogues with several authors who denote that patriarchal culture has been one of the factors that most affect political violence that prohibits women from having a more effective presence in spaces of power and decision-making. The electoral results presented denote this assertion that is affirmed in the devaluation of women and male superiority.

KEYWORDS: Underrepresentation. Gender. Politics. Brazil.

RESUMO: No Brasil, a sub-representação de mulheres em cargos eletivos aponta para uma democracia não consolidada. Os 17% de representação feminina na Câmara Federal retratam as dificuldades do Estado brasileiro de elevar os patamares de presença feminina, mesmo considerando a política de cotas. Tais dificuldades se explicam na cultura patriarcal que perpassa as organizações sociais e instituições políticas, entre as quais os partidos e sindicatos. Ao comparar o Brasil com outras nações latino-americanas, observa-se que países como Argentina, Bolívia e Costa Rica alcançaram patamares semelhantes aos europeus. O recente impeachment que resultou na destituição de Dilma Rousseff da presidência do país evidencia que no Brasil, o conservadorismo, o patriarcado e a misoginia são perpetuados nas relações políticas, sustentados pela mídia, setores do judiciário e pelas bancadas fundamentalistas do Congresso. Esses fatos têm contribuído para acirrar mais ainda as desigualdades de gênero e classe. Este texto apresenta reflexões construídas a partir de estudos e pesquisas desenvolvidas nas duas últimas décadas (2010, 2015, 2019), enriquecidas por diálogos com diversos autores que denotam que a cultura patriarcal tem sido um dos fatores que mais incide sobre a violência política que interdita as mulheres de ter uma presença mais efetiva nos espaços de poder e decisão. Os resultados eleitorais apresentados denotam essa assertiva que se afirma na desvalorização das mulheres e na superioridade masculina.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Sub-representação. Gênero. Política. Brazil.

RESUMEN: *En Brasil, la subrepresentación de las mujeres en cargos electos apunta a una democracia no consolidada. La representación femenina del 17% en la Cámara Federal retrata las dificultades del Estado brasileño para elevar los niveles de presencia femenina, incluso considerando la política de cuotas. Estas dificultades se explican por la cultura patriarcal que impregna las organizaciones sociales y las instituciones políticas, incluidos partidos y sindicatos. Al comparar Brasil con otras naciones latinoamericanas, se observa que países como Argentina, Bolivia y Costa Rica han alcanzado niveles similares a los de Europa. El reciente golpe de Estado que destituyó a Dilma Rousseff como presidenta del país muestra que en Brasil el conservadurismo, el patriarcado y la misoginia se han renovado en las relaciones políticas, apoyados por los medios de comunicación, sectores del poder judicial y las bancadas fundamentalistas del Congreso. Estos hechos han contribuido a exacerbar aún más las desigualdades de género y clase. Este texto presenta reflexiones construidas a partir de estudios e investigaciones desarrolladas en las últimas dos décadas (2010, 2015, 2019), enriquecidas por diálogos con varios autores que denotan que la cultura patriarcal ha sido uno de los factores que más incide en la violencia política que prohíbe a las mujeres tener una presencia más efectiva en los espacios de poder y toma de decisiones. Los resultados electorales presentados denotan esta afirmación que se afirma en la devaluación de la mujer y la superioridad masculina.*

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Subrepresentación. Género. Política. Brasil.*

Introduction

Studies on gender and politics in Brazil have highlighted that the persistence of female underrepresentation reflects women's subordination in society and the limited efforts by political parties to recruit them for elected positions. It is accurate to assert that this underrepresentation marks the contradictions of democracy in Brazil, considering electoral outcomes that depict the gaps in representative democracy by excluding historically marginalized segments from participation: women, indigenous peoples, Black individuals, and the poor. This fact sets Brazil apart from many Latin American and European nations, where indicators of women's presence in politics reflect advances made in these countries during the last two decades of the 21st century.

According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union, in countries like Rwanda, Cuba, and Nicaragua, women outnumber men in political representation. Women in these countries' upper chambers represent more than 50% of the members. For instance, 61.3% of seats in Rwanda are held by female representatives, followed by Cuba with 53.4%, Nicaragua with 50.6%, and Mexico with women occupying 50% of the main seats. In Bolivia, the changes initiated since

Evo Morales's³ election in 2006 have led to significant advances in democracy, culminating in the election of the most prominent female caucus in 2017, when Bolivians elected 53.1% female deputies to the Bolivian parliament. This is remarkable, considering that two decades ago, women represented only 12% (FERREIRA, 2010; 2019).

Nations like Cuba, Mexico, and Nicaragua join many European countries that, since the mid-20th century, have begun to change gender relations in legislative spaces. Countries such as Sweden, Norway, and Denmark have been altering patriarchal political structures for over five decades through a set of measures that have become necessary to ensure greater female representation in power.

Dahlerup's studies (1999) indicate that since 1986, Norwegian, Swedish, and Danish women have maintained a nearly equal relationship compared to their male counterparts, stemming from the election of representative minorities. The increase in female representation is attributed to various factors, including quota policies, as well as "results from changes in the educational and social position of women and other structural changes in society and the political system" (DAHLERUP, 1999, p. 152, our translation). The increase in representation, in turn, has led in subsequent years to implementing public policies that have altered the lives of citizens residing in the Scandinavian countries, as indicated by Ferreira's studies (2019, p. 34, our translation):

The changes that have taken place in much of Europe, stemming from the feminist struggle of the early 20th century, can be measured by the breadth of gender equality public policies that have been implemented since the late 1970s. It is essential to highlight that in countries like Sweden, Denmark, and Finland, women already constituted over 30% of parliament in the 1970s, which has influenced the array of gender equality public policies developed over the past fifty years.

To understand women's exclusion from politics and how the interdiction processes are slow, one only needs to look back to the early 20th century, when women were still prevented from moving about and expressing their ideas in public places. This indicates that the processes of women's interdiction in public spaces were, for a long time, justified by the patriarchal view

³ Evo Morales served as the President of Bolivia for three consecutive terms, from 2006 to 2019. He was a union leader of the *cocaleros* – farmers who cultivate the coca plant. He led a coalition government throughout his mandates and resisted American pressures, but in 2019, he resigned from the presidency following a coup orchestrated by the Organization of American States (OAS), as reported by the international community (KIST, 2019).

constructed, naturalized, and disseminated based on the determination that *there were places designated for men and places designated for women*.

The place designated for men was always the public sphere, the place of dialogue, and the place of power, while women were and still are confined to the private sphere, silence, and confinement. By determining and delineating masculine and feminine places, society silenced and nullified women from political life, not recognizing their ability to influence society. Thus, according to Ferreira (2020), ideologies based on stereotypes were constructed, which:

[...] reinforced the "inability" of women to manage public goods, given their "fragility," "irrationality," "submissiveness," and even "emotion." For the "virtuous" men of that time, staunch opponents of women's emancipation, power, and parliament were not compatible with women, who were deemed prone to "strong emotion." Moreover, what would a woman do in an unsuitable environment for proper ladies? Such arguments were decisive factors in establishing relations of inequality and denying women the right to decide and contribute to the destinies of cities and nations (FERREIRA, 2020, p. 14, our translation).

While these ideologies have been deconstructed in some nations, as mentioned, in Brazil, the aversion to change in the political landscape reflects gender and ethnic-racial indicators, indicating the entrapment of Brazilian society in a racist and patriarchal culture. The indices of political violence against women since 2015 expose democracy and intimidate women who dare to break free from the processes of interdiction.

In this context, the purpose of this article is to reflect on how female underrepresentation in Brazil reveals the misconceptions and contradictions of democracy in this country. It also discusses how political party practices marked by patriarchal culture inhibit women's rights to participate equally in the construction of the political space, as political parties are responsible for recruiting candidates. This largely explains the tiny number of women willing to run for office, naturalizing processes of exclusion and reinforcing the famous phrase: "Women don't like politics!".

The article is divided into two intrinsically linked moments: the first discusses patriarchy and women's representation in decision-making spaces, presenting examples of how this participation advances in gender discourse but, at the same time, is limited by the patriarchal culture that pervades social and political relations daily. In the second part, the article reflects, through data, on the slow ascent of women to elected positions and how social institutions, notably macho and patriarchal ones, interfere with women's citizenship, denying their recognition as rights-bearing subjects.

Patriarchy, Representation, and Political Participation: How Society Nullifies and Interdicts Women

Reading Karl Marx allows us to understand the necessity and urgency of building an alternative to capitalist society, especially in these dark times when fascism has taken hold in many nations, including Brazil. Similarly, reading Simone de Beauvoir prompts us to discover that "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman." This complements the author's perspective.

[...] No biological, psychological, economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is the entire social ensemble that elaborates this intermediate product between the male and the eunuch that is called femininity (BEAUVOIR, 1975, p. 9, our translation).

The fate of women is sealed from birth: to marry, have children, be enslaved, belong to someone. In many communities, in small Brazilian towns, such as Arari (MA), in the 21st century, it is still expected to label women as "*Maria de Francisco Souza*", "*Marta de Antônio José*", "*Juliana de Pedro do Rosário*"⁴. Women continue to be seen as someone's property. This fact explains the persistence of patriarchy, which constitutes one of the pillars of macho culture and one of the greatest obstacles to recognizing women as subjects of rights.

According to Lerner (2019), the creation of patriarchy dates back to more than two millennia. Its principle emerges in the archaic state, with the basic unit of its organization being the patriarchal family, which views women as objects, without autonomy, and insignificant. Patriarchal culture considers women irrelevant in the entire process of civilization, denies their presence, and also sidelines their productive strength. Historically, patriarchy created rules and expressed values that became embedded in society, internalizing themselves as truths, stemming from male ideology and power. Federici (2017, p. 27, our translation) argues that Karl Marx "could never have supposed that capitalism was preparing the way for human liberation if he had looked at its history from the point of view of women". This is because history reveals that men have achieved a certain degree of formal freedom since ancient times, while women have been treated as socially inferior beings.

The studies by Federici (2017) and Lerner (2019) pave the way to understanding the persistence of this system of oppression dating back to the time of slavery. The way groups conquered tribes already evidenced patriarchal culture, considering that the first to be captured and enslaved were women, while men were killed.

⁴ "Maria, wife of Francisco Souza," "Marta, wife of Antônio José," "Juliana, wife of Pedro do Rosário."

[...] Only after men learned how to enslave the women of groups that could be defined as strangers did they learn to enslave the men of those groups and then subordinate groups of their societies (LERNER, 2019, p. 351, our translation).

The author considers that the enslavement of women during that period was associated with a combination of racism and sexism that preceded class society. Class differences were, at their inception, expressed and constituted in terms of patriarchal relations. It is true to affirm that women, like men, constitute oppressed and subordinate groups. Throughout human history, this is visible and constitutes the essence of the social struggle for emancipation and freedom, especially related to the struggle for survival and overcoming needs. However, it cannot be overlooked that in the context of social changes, "[...] women fought against forms of oppression and domination different from those of men, and their struggle, to this day, is more backward than that of men" (LERNER, 2019, p. 353, our translation). An example of this assertion is the struggle to insert themselves into spaces of power and decision-making, a place that, as Perrot (2005a; 2005b), asserts, continues to be seen as a "sanctuary" dominated by men who determine the rules of that power and define how women should act.

While patriarchy oppresses and nullifies women, capitalism, which emerged with the constitution of new times of freedom propagated by the French Revolution, sidelines their place in this world, invisibilizing their presence by determining their silence in history, confining them to domestic spaces or subordinate jobs. This situation, which was fading in Europe in the 19th century, gained more expression of struggle in Latin American countries, such as Brazil, in the mid-20th century with the emergence of feminist movements and the fight against dictatorships.

Throughout the trajectory of democracy in Brazil, characterized by advances and setbacks, as well as coups and counter-coups, the Revolution of 1930 stands out. This event marked a rupture with the Old Republic, dominated by regional oligarchies that prioritized their individual interests over the interests of the nation. Thirty-four years later, in 1964, as Brazil was rebuilding state policies, the military staged the Military Coup of 1964 against then-President João Goulart, destabilizing the nascent democracy and implanting an authoritarian regime that lasted twenty-one years. The efforts undertaken by social organizations (feminist movements, unions, political parties, and churches, among others) to restore the country became constant, diversified, and radical, culminating in the political opening, the removal of the military from power, and the promulgation of a new Brazilian Constitution in 1988, considered one of the most democratic and inclusive constitutions in the world.

The efforts to make Brazil a democratic nation did not, and do not, rely solely on the strength, pressure, and action of men. Women have undertaken numerous movements for the democratic state of law under construction in Brazil to include them. The struggle of women for recognition, rights, education, freedom, work, and income is transcribed on the pages of a history that only recently recognized them as subjects. It is a struggle that did not begin with the suffragettes at the end of the 19th century; these are struggles that delve into the slave quarters, the mansions, and the first factories created in the country. One can learn about these efforts through women's literature and feminist struggles that emerged in the sixties and seventies (20th century), in the fight against slavery, for suffrage, education and work, and in resistance to dictatorship, as reflected in the studies by Alves (1980), Hahner (1981), Costa (1998, 2009), Ferreira (2010; 2015; 2020, 2022), and Nascimento (2020).

Gender and Political Representation in Brazil: Notes to Understand the Historical Dimension of the Feminist Struggle for Equality

The gender category allows us to understand the processes of women's subordination as a construction of patriarchal societies. Being relational, the category allows us to analyze, throughout history and in different societies, how inequalities were naturalized and how they deepened in capitalist societies. It also explains their current persistence due to the values learned and reproduced through various structures that accept and reinforce unequal gender relations. Among these structures, we highlight the family, the school, the church and its religious apparatus, judicial sectors, political parties, and trade unions, among others.

Through this analytical category, it is possible to understand that the subordination of women and their consequent exclusion from the public sphere is a historical construction institutionalized in the oldest codes of laws and imposed by the power of the State. In Brazil, it is enough to evaluate the legislation passed throughout the Nation-State's constitution. For example: the Civil Code of 1916 established that paternal power belonged to the husband and, only in his absence, did the woman exercise that power. Only in this century, precisely in 2002, with the approval of a new Civil Code, it was established that the leadership of the family should be exercised by both collaboratively, that is, "The direction of the conjugal society will be exercised, in collaboration, by the husband and the wife, always in the interest of the couple and the children" (BRASIL, 2002, art. 1.567, p. 342, our translation).

The restrictions on political participation imposed on Brazilian women were gradually diluted, starting from changes in the Electoral Code of 1932, when the right to vote was granted to married, widowed, and single women who had their income. Note that in this first legislation granting women the right to vote, the majority of them did not have access to exercise this right, considering their dependency due to lack of their income.

It is also important to remember that with the approval of the Married Women's Statute (Law No. 4,121/62), some legal inconsistencies were corrected, but other intolerable ones remained in force, such as: 1) the permission to annul the marriage in cases where the husband discovered that the woman had already had sexual relations before marriage; 2) the maintenance of the possibility for the father to disinherit the daughter considered "dishonorable" (ALMEIDA, 2019).

The restrictions and subordination imposed on women by codes, norms, and laws prevented them from engaging in any type of work outside the home. A woman could only perform any function other than domestic work when authorized by her husband, who had the right to revoke this authorization at any time. The Consolidation of Labor Laws (CLT), in its article 446, established this condition, which was only revoked in 1989 by Law 7,855:

The husband or father is allowed to plead for the termination of the [woman's] employment contract, when its continuation is likely to endanger family ties, pose a manifest danger to the peculiar conditions of the woman, or cause physical or moral harm to the minor (BRASIL, 1943, our translation).

As can be observed, the processes of interdiction of female populations in the workforce and public life are expressed in Brazilian legislation and are reinforced by the patriarchal culture that remains faithful to centuries-old codes. The facts presented here allow us to understand how the processes of interdiction of women in politics were constructed and how they materialized in macho and patriarchal political practices to interfere with their ascension to decision-making positions, especially in legislative spaces, where, as mentioned, Brazil is among the countries where the female public is one of the most underrepresented.

Gender inequality in legislative and executive positions in Brazil is evident. The numbers indicate that, even considering women's struggle over nine decades, females represent approximately 17% of elected deputies in the Federal Chamber in 2022. In municipal councils, women represent 13%. In the executive branch, the presence of women still causes astonishment, given the still very low numbers of female mayors and governors in the country. In the current scenario, only two women were elected: Governor Fátima Bezerra for the state

of Rio Grande do Norte in her second term and Raquel Lyra, who governs the state of Pernambuco in her first term. Both have extensive experience as managers and parliamentarians in previous terms.

If today it still causes astonishment to see a woman in power, as seen when Dilma Rousseff was elected in 2010 and reelected in 2014, let us imagine in 1934 when only Carlota Pereira de Queiroz from São Paulo was elected to the Federal Chamber. A similar situation was observed in 1979 when Eunice Michiles assumed the position of senator after the death of the incumbent, Senator João Bosco Ramos de Lima (ARENA). The trajectory of the first Brazilian senator described in Vale's (2020) study reflects the history of many women who fought tenaciously and managed to break the anonymity, resisting the process of exclusion imposed on them by the patriarchal society of yesterday and which persists today.

The stigmas Carlota Pereira de Queiroz faced when she was elected to the Federal Chamber in 1934 were the same as when Senator Eunice Michiles took office in the Senate in 1979. They remained the same stigmas imposed on President Dilma Rousseff when she took office in 2011. The clarity of the political role that each one developed at different moments in Brazilian political life and the limitations imposed on them by the position and/or mandate were always understood as challenges overcome in the process of parliamentary action. The case of Dilma Rousseff was the most emblematic, as it culminated in a coup removing her from power.

When addressing the theme of women's political representation and underrepresentation in Brazil, one must consider the intense struggle of suffragists dating back to the late 19th century, who were in line with the struggles of women from other nations imbued with the same purposes since the beginning of that century, such as England, France, Denmark, among other nations. In these countries, women were engaged in the struggle for citizenship, especially the right to vote and the fight against slavery. Although belatedly, these movements began to circulate in various states of Brazil, especially in the states of Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, and Bahia.

Reflecting on the exclusion of women from decision-making and power spaces in Brazil, it is essential to turn our attention to the organization of public and private life in this country, precisely because its contradictions stem from a racist and patriarchal elite. The writing of Jessé de Souza (2017) is quite illustrative when he tells us:

The patriarchal family encompassed all of society. Not only the dominant element, formed by the master and his nuclear family, but also the intermediate elements constituted by the enormous number of bastards and dependents, in

addition to the base of domestic slaves and, at the bottom of the hierarchy, the field slaves (SOUZA, 2017, p. 42, our translation).

The exclusion of women and Black people in Brazil followed a project of denial and acceptance of them as political subjects. The patriarchal heritage justified, and still justifies, the confinement of women in the private sphere, since the public sphere was intended for those who hold power, namely, those who have dominion over the economy, politics, the state, and social life. The public sphere is the place of dialogue, discourse, speech; it is a place that did not fit, and still does not fit, women, as indicated by electoral data.

To understand the process of exclusion of women in Brazilian politics and the slow pace of its overcoming, it is necessary to delve into the world of women and observe the burden of household tasks that keep them away from the public sphere. The time that women dedicate to household chores and caring for children and the elderly significantly limits the time they can devote to political participation. Historically, this restriction has been one of the main impediments to women in the public sphere. Their still limited presence in leadership positions in parties, unions, and other political organizations reflects the lack of recognition of their role as political subjects. Nevertheless, their contribution to the daily activities that keep these organizations functioning and alive is valued.

It is always worth remembering that the absence of women in elected positions reflects the patriarchal view of political organizations, which have not built ways to ensure the presence and participation of women in positions of power and decision-making. According to Ferreira (2010):

The absence of women in these representative spaces of society reflects on the formation of mentalities and the feeling of inferiority incorporated by women themselves and by other social subjects. From these spaces, it is possible to perceive how these distinctions between what is 'allowed' and what is 'denied', which permeate the entire patriarchal society, are invisible and make it difficult for women to break free from this 'determined destiny' that excludes them from participating in public life (FERREIRA, 2010, p. 49, our translation).

Brazilian women have been fighting for centuries to ensure rights, equality, and social justice. Since the struggle for suffrage in the late 19th century, women have developed various strategies, including marches, strikes, and other demonstrations that proliferated throughout Brazil. These demonstrations spread through the press via women's writing, in which they expressed their discontent against the oppressive situation that confined them to the private

sphere. Given the prohibitions imposed on them by patriarchal society, women wrote under pseudonyms, thus fulfilling a crucial political role in showing the suffragists' dissatisfaction with the denial of the right to vote.

It is important to remember that the struggles and demands of women did not dissipate with the achievement of suffrage in 1932. After this great feat, women continued to promote and lead movements, strikes, and protests that spanned the Estado Novo period in the thirties and forties. These struggles intensified in the sixties and seventies and were articulated with anarchist movements, in the fight for education, against the military dictatorship. In the late seventies and eighties, the struggles were directed against inflation, violence against women, and the legalization of abortion, which were added to the struggles for amnesty, direct elections, and the democratization of the country, considered the main flags of the feminist movements that had a very positive impact on the national political scene (FERREIRA, 2007).

It is worth noting that women have always been present when fighting for rights, equality, freedom, bread, and justice in this country. In the struggle for direct elections in the early eighties of the 20th century, women played an extremely relevant role, showing that, alongside the lack of freedom of expression, the social conditions aggravated by capitalism, there was also the oppression of men over women, which curtailed their rights, made their presence invisible, and negated their political participation. In this context of struggle, the feminist movement played a relevant role in bringing to light not only the contradictions of capitalist and patriarchal society but also the importance of women's political organization. From the eighties onwards, women's struggle became massified, and the issue of violence became central.

The issue of violence against women has, over the decades, become the most mobilizing theme for organized women's movements. It can be affirmed that, since the emergence of feminism, it is unanimous that this is a problem that affects women of all social classes, generations, beliefs, races, and ethnicities.

Violence is also the subject of the majority of public policies implemented in Brazil in recent decades, as a result of the uninterrupted struggles of feminist movements. From these struggles, it was possible to advance in the construction of public structures that made it possible to visualize social injustices and the deficits the Brazilian state had in relation to female populations. Thus, the creation and implementation of legal and protective structures for women, gender education programs in schools, and the quota law in politics constituted necessary instruments for the protection and valorization of women.

The structures were further expanded in the last two decades, especially from 2003 to 2015, including the governments of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and Dilma Rousseff. Courts to combat violence, women's prosecutor's offices, labor laws, changes in the Civil Code, "[...] expansion of research with a gender focus and strengthening of women's policy agencies give a real dimension to the advances of feminist struggles and the response of the Brazilian state to these demands" (FERREIRA, 2015, p. 34, our translation).

It is true that progress has been made regarding the social rights of women; however, the same cannot be said regarding sexual and reproductive rights, which have regressed, and regarding political rights, given the under-representation that places Brazil among the countries with the lowest representation in the world, as mentioned in this text.

Gender inequality in Brazilian politics and quotas for increasing women's participation in politics

When reflecting on the need for changes in the Brazilian political system, it is imperative that there be a significant investment by the Brazilian state more directly in the political education of society, especially women, guaranteeing legal spaces for the exercise of political power by them. In ensuring spaces, it is essential that political parties comply with the Quota Law and create mechanisms to guarantee women's political participation.

This assertion is justified because the Quota Law is an achievement of women's and feminist movements to build equality and parity between genders in positions of power. Quotas for women in politics are a response from the Brazilian state to feminist movements after the X World Conference on Women held in China 1995. In this conference, one of the common points of women's struggle worldwide was the right to political representation and increased participation of women in decision-making processes.

The quota policy in Brazil, adopted through Law No. 9,096/95, established quotas of 20%. In 1996, this law was amended by Law No. 9,504/96, increasing the quotas to a minimum of 30% and a maximum of 70% for each sex, that is, gender quotas. In 2009, this legislation underwent another alteration. This time, the new law ensured the choice and registration of candidates through the calculation of the percentage based on the "number of required vacancies," and no longer on the number of vacancies to be filled. Based on this context and the reflections presented, let us then discuss: what sets Brazil apart from Bolivia, Costa Rica, and Argentina? Why does the Quota Policy not work in Brazil?

The differences lie primarily in the system adopted by the parties. In these countries, the closed list system is adopted, meaning that voters choose from a ranked list of candidates without the possibility of expressing preferences or modifying their position. The lists are prepared by the parties, which define the composition and organize the candidates according to their priority for election. Borner (2009, p. 69, our translation) clarifies that:

[...] there is no agreement among experts about the advantages of closed lists for promoting the participation of women in political representation bodies; in the case of Argentina, this voting modality constitutes a key factor in explaining the remarkable effectiveness achieved by the Women's Quota Law.

Unfortunately, in Brazil, there is a lack of compliance with the laws governing quota policies. A large part of the parties does not comply with the legislation, does not invest in female candidacies, and even creates mechanisms to avoid penalties. The data on the political representation of women in the National Congress demonstrate that, unlike what is happening in countries such as Bolivia, Costa Rica, and Argentina, women in Brazil do not exceed 17% (seventeen percent) in elected positions. Such data is also replicated in state and municipal legislatures.

Women in Representative Positions in Brazilian Power Structures

What can be observed from the election results, as shown in Table 1, is that little has changed in female representation in positions of power in Brazil in recent decades, during what has been termed the democratization of Brazil. Even considering the actions of feminist movements, women remain underrepresented.

Table 1 - Female representation in the Brazilian Federal Chamber - 1995 to 2022

LEGISLATIVE PERIOD	FEMALE DEPUTIES	MALE DEPUTIES	TOTAL
2023-2026	91	422	513
2019-2022	77	436	513
2015-2018	51	462	513
2011-2014	45	468	513
2007-2010	45	468	513
2003-2006	42	471	513
1999-2002	28	485	513
1995-1998	34	479	513
TOTAL	413	3.691	

Source: Data from Mary Ferreira Research, 2019. TRE, 2018.



The data presented in Table 1 indicate that, over 27 years, changes in gender and political indicators have been minimal. These numbers highlight the underrepresentation of women in power and reflect the malfunctioning of representative democracy in Brazil, given that the elected deputies in recent elections translate into an unacceptable exclusion of social segments. The data show that in twenty-seven years, only three hundred and twenty-two women were elected, while men occupied three thousand three hundred and sixty-nine seats.

The seriousness of the situation is also evident in the benches elected in 2018 and 2022, composed mostly of ruralists, businessmen, and evangelicals. However, in the 2022 elections, a small number of unionists were elected, reflecting the class bias that is also present in the profile of parliamentarians. In these last two elections, the gradual increase in women was noteworthy, considering the ninety-one elected federal deputies. However, it cannot be overlooked that few of them identify with the historical banners of feminist movements.

The mentioned data highlight the exclusion of women from power, which adds to the underrepresentation of blacks and the poor. The current political landscape demonstrates that the class struggle has never been so clearly outlined in this country since the coup that removed President Dilma Rousseff from office and the events that led to the election of Bolsonaro in 2018.

What was witnessed in the last election held in 2018, with the rise of Jair Bolsonaro, was the intensification of hatred and the worsening of ethnic-racial violence and gender violence, as evidenced by data showing the exacerbated increase of the phenomenon. This violence was widely disseminated at the moment when reactionary forces were formed to oust President Dilma Rousseff in 2016.

It is important to remember that the entire process called "*impeachment*" was marked by brutal violence that reflects the sharp increase in political violence against women, normalized in the patriarchal society in which we live. Dilma Rousseff was certainly one of the greatest victims. This fact is noted when images of simulated rapes were circulated to undermine her moral standing. At a later stage, during the *impeachment* process in Congress, she was deeply affected by words and verbal aggressions that expressed a lack of respect for a woman, especially for what she represented.

The atmosphere of mockery, rivalry, and personal aggression attributed to the then-president demarcates the lack of ethical and political principles that guided the action of Congress at that historical moment, as well as the disqualification of women for elected

positions. It became evident that the acts that culminated in the coup on April 17, 2016, whose speeches testified to the sexism, prejudice, and misogyny of Brazilian deputies in that session, marked the peak of fascism in Brazil.

The expression "*tchau querida*" (goodbye dear) adds to other statements that denote aggression towards President Dilma Rousseff. One of the most violent attacks was by then deputy Jair Bolsonaro, who declared:

For the family and the innocence of children in the classroom, which the PT never had... Against communism, for our freedom, against Folha de S. Paulo, in memory of Colonel Carlos Alberto Brilhante Ustra, the terror of Dilma Rousseff (XAVIER, 2017, p. 2, our translation).

Another highly unusual statement was made by then President of Congress, Eduardo Cunha (PMDB), who was arrested shortly after the coup, and declared: "May God have mercy on this nation. I vote 'Yes'" (XAVIER, 2017, p. 2, our translation). These two statements not only express the cruelty of reminding Dilma Rousseff of the suffering she endured in the torture chambers, orchestrated by the mentioned general, but also the perverse manner in which men who assert themselves in patriarchy act, in complicity with a society that, besides being sexist, is violent and often seems to ignore principles of humanity.

From this context, we can affirm that the underrepresentation of women in legislative spaces is a consequence of the deeply entrenched sexist and patriarchal culture within political organizations. Male dominance reflects the reluctance of men to discuss and question their privileges, also indicating the persistence of the sexual division of labor, which results in the subordination of women, affecting their exercise of citizenship.

Thus, what is observed is that within this patriarchal model prevalent in Brazil, the sexual division of labor favors men, and, to a lesser extent, white women, as reflected by Biroli (2018, p. 42, our translation):

The sexual division of labor is anchored in the naturalization of relations of authority and subordination, which are presented as if they were based on biology and/or racially justified. Together, the gender, race, and social class restrictions confirm choices, unequally impose responsibilities, and incite certain occupations, while blocking or hindering access to others.

Finally, it is essential to consider that the underrepresentation of Brazilian women in positions of power and decision-making entails various additional issues. This includes the late entry of women into higher education, the burden of a double workload, which reduces their

participation in political parties, the impoverishment of women, and their struggle for survival. Furthermore, it is crucial to mention the high number of women heads of households, reaching 38%, who are solely responsible for supporting their children due to the absence of the father. Adding to this, one cannot underestimate the role of patriarchal culture, which wields significant power in the political and party life of the country.

Final considerations

The purpose of this article was to reflect on the underrepresentation of women in positions of power, especially in legislative bodies, a fact that demarcates the contradictions of democracy in Brazil. In this study, we presented electoral data from other countries and how they have altered unequal relations, increasing the presence of women in legislatures, which in turn have gradually transformed gender relations in formal politics through legislation.

The process of excluding women affects the social imagination that sees them as less inclined toward politics. Their still limited presence in leadership positions in universities, state secretariats, political parties, unions, and political organizations reflects their lack of recognition and consequent devaluation. They are even considering their presence in the daily activities of parties and unions, as well as in the structures of organizations, which are reinforced by the sexual division of labor and other multiple factors that are obscured by maternalistic ideology, imposing seemingly incompatible roles on women with activism and political action.

The roles reproduced within organizations, especially political parties and unions, reinforce and naturalize exclusion, as expressed in phrases like "women don't want to run for office" and "this is not a suitable place for women." In other words, men consider themselves the "masters of power and institutions." Decisions effectively go through them. Parties in Brazil continue to be male sanctuaries, for men, with women still occupying subordinate positions, although small changes are being observed, such as: the election of Gleisi Hoffmann as president of one of Brazil's largest political parties, the Workers' Party (PT), in 2017, the candidacies of Dilma Rousseff (PT), Marina Silva (Citizenship), and Cláudia Durans (PSTU - Unified Socialist Workers' Party), and Dilma Rousseff's election and reelection in 2010 and 2014.

Analyzing the impeachment process, politically termed as a coup, it is noted that from that moment on, the country's political landscape was altered by conservative forces, where patriarchal culture prevailed. This culture was allied with capitalist forces, intensifying the class struggle and compromising democracy under construction in Brazil.

REFERENCES

- ALMEIDA, M. A. **Violências contra as mulheres no Maranhão e a atuação do legislativo estadual para o seu enfrentamento**: análise das proposições legislativas apresentadas nos anos de 2011 a 2018. 2019. 178 f. Dissertação (Mestrado em Políticas Públicas) – Universidade Federal do Maranhão, São Luís, 2019.
- ALVES, B. M. **Ideologia e feminismo**: a luta da mulher pelo voto no Brasil. Petrópolis, 1980.
- BIROLI, F. **Gênero e desigualdades**: limites da democracia no Brasil. São Paulo: Boitempo, 2018.
- BORNER, J. A Lei de cota feminina: conquistas e desafios da experiência Argentina. *In*: COSTA, A. A. A. (org.). **Trilhas do poder das mulheres**: experiências internacionais em ações afirmativas. Brasília, DF: Câmara dos Deputados, 2009. p. 62-89.
- BRASIL. **Decreto-Lei n. 5.452, de 1 de maio de 1943**. Brasília, DF: Presidência da República, 1943. Available at: <https://www2.camara.leg.br/legin/fed/declei/1940-1949/decreto-lei-5452-1-maio-1943-415500-publicacaooriginal-1-pe.html>. Accessed in: 15 Sept. 2023.
- BRASIL. Código Civil (2002). **Código civil brasileiro e legislação correlata**. 2. ed. Brasília, DF: Senado Federal, Subsecretaria de Edições Técnicas, 2008. Available at: <https://www2.senado.leg.br/bdsf/bitstream/handle/id/70327/C%C3%B3digo%20Civil%202020ed.pdf>. Accessed in: 15 Sept. 2023.
- COSTA, A. A. A. **As donas do poder**: mulher e política na Bahia. Salvador: NEIM/UFBa, 1998.
- COSTA, A. A. A. (org.). **Trilhas do poder das mulheres**: experiências internacionais em ações afirmativas. Brasília, DF: Câmara dos Deputados, Edições Câmara, 2009.
- DAHLERUP, D. De uma pequena a uma grande minoria: uma teoria da “massa crítica” aplicada ao caso das mulheres na política escandinava. **Debate Feminista**, p. 142-183, 1999.
- FEDERICI, S. **Calibã e a bruxa**: mulheres, corpo e acumulação primitiva. São Paulo: Elefante, 2017.
- FERREIRA, M. M. **As Caetanas vão à luta**: feminismos e políticas públicas no Maranhão. São Luís: EDUFMA, 2007.
- FERREIRA, M. M. **Os Bastidores da Tribuna**: mulher, política e poder no Maranhão. São Luís: EDUFMA, 2010.
- FERREIRA, M. M. **Vereadoras e prefeitas maranhenses**: ação política e gestão municipal com enfoque de gênero. São Luís: EDUFMA, 2015.

FERREIRA, M. M. **Mulheres, protagonismo e sub-representação**: dados para pensar e transformar as relações de gênero no Maranhão. São Luís, 2019.

FERREIRA, M. M. **Mulheres, protagonismo e sub-representação**: dados para pensar e transformar as relações de gênero no Maranhão. São Luís, 2020.

FERREIRA, M. M. Gênero, sexualidades e educação no Brasil e suas imbricações no exercício político das mulheres. *In*: SILVA, S. M. P. da; MACHADO, R. N. da S. **Gêneros e diversidades e inclusão educacional**. Curitiba: CRV, 2022. p. 131-148.

HAHNER, J. **A mulher brasileira e suas lutas sociais: 1850-1937**. São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1981.

KIST, J. S. Crise na Bolívia: protestos e a renúncia de Evo Morales. **Politize**, 22 nov. 2019. Available at:

https://www.politize.com.br/bolivia/?https://www.politize.com.br/&gclid=EAIaIQobChMIgPLc9fqxgQMVCKeRCh239wZiEAAYASAAEgKbp_D_BwE. Accessed in: 15 Sept. 2023.

LERNER, G. **A criação do patriarcado**: história da opressão das mulheres pelos homens. Tradução: Luiza Sellera, São Paulo: Cultrix, 2019.

MARX, K. **O Capital**: crítica da economia política. 14. ed. São Paulo: Bertrand, 1994.

NASCIMENTO, S. M. V do. Mulheres negras e ação política: processos que vem de longe. *In*: FERREIRA, M. M. **Mulheres, protagonismo e sub-representação**: dados para pensar e transformar as relações de gênero no Maranhão. São Luís, 2020, p. 55-65.

PERROT, M. **Minha história das mulheres**. Tradução: Ângela Corrêa. São Paulo: Contexto, 2005a. 190 p.

PERROT, M. **As mulheres e o silêncio da história**. Bauru, SP: EDUCS, 2005b.

SOUZA, J de. **A Elite do atraso**: da escravidão à lava jato. Rio de Janeiro: Leya, 2017.

VALE, M. de S. **Mulheres no Poder**: a trajetória política de Eunice Michiles, a primeira senadora no Brasil. São Paulo: Apris, 2020.

XAVIER, R. M. ‘Como vota, deputado?’: relembre sessão de abertura do impeachment de Dilma. **Poder 360**, [S. l.], 17 abr. 2017. Available at: <https://www.poder360.com.br/brasil/como-vota-deputado-relembre-sessao-de-abertura-do-impeachment-de-dilma>. Accessed in: 12 June 2022.

CRediT Author Statement

Acknowledgements: I gratefully acknowledge FAPEMA for funding the Women and Political Protagonism in Maranhão research project, which underpins most of the reflections in this article.

Funding: FAPEMA.

Conflicts of interest: There are no conflicts of interest.

Ethical approval: Not applicable.

Data and material availability: The data cited is available in books and articles cited by the author.

Author's contributions: Single authorship.

Processing and editing: Editora Ibero-Americana de Educação.
Proofreading, formatting, normalization and translation.

