Editorial

The importance of (re)thinking about female political leadership in Latin America

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The main notion of representation is based on the alignment between a person in a position of power and the members of society, who act according to individual desires, whether articulated or not (Pitkin, 1967). Therefore, there is significant interest in analyzing the leadership skills of those in power and the political strategies they employ to attain and maintain this position. Currently, these dynamics of symbolic representation must be examined in light of the insertion of social networks in political communication, which has transformed the dominant actors and processes of 20th-century political communication, adapting to the new context. The strategies of political actors have been permeated by this new scenario, reconstructing the way they interact and connect with their electorate, while building their image and leadership styles. Social networks influence the flow of information and interactions between network actors, generating links that connect politicians, parties, their support networks, and the electorate (Luzuriaga and Baquerizo-Neira, 2022). This is evidenced, for example, in the role of social networks in the construction of the image and discourses of political leaders, including the growing prominence of women leaders in Latin America, who face additional challenges to legitimize their leadership and political styles.

As in other regions, political leadership in Latin America has been affected by technological transformations and new communication tools. However, it is important to distinguish how political realities have changed according to the particularities of each region and country. Although Latin American politics has a strong Western influence, it follows its path -sometimes convulsive- that positions it as an extremely interesting case study to explore the relationship between political leaders and citizens/voters. Within this panorama, female leadership in the region

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has emerged as a key phenomenon, shaped by local political dynamics and new forms of digital communication. Women leaders such as Dilma Rousseff, Cristina Fernandez, or Xiomara Castro have used these platforms to build narratives that combine populist elements with a gender approach, challenging traditional norms of political power. This development offers a unique opportunity to study the intersections between gender, politics, and technology from the Global South, contributing to the questioning of dominant power structures.

In this sense, the interest in (in)visible and (re)invented political practices, discourses, and spaces also includes technological transformations and new digital communication tools, which may lead to the discussion of new methodologies to address these issues (Rivera Garay, 2021; cited by Villarreal Velásquez and Rescher, 2022). Latin American women leaders, through these tools, have found ways to make their presence visible and to connect with their support bases, confronting gender stereotypes and positioning themselves as key actors in the political systems of the region. There is already talk of Southern Communicologies, which seek to study "these actions in their different dimensions, such as personal, social, media or virtual interactions, following the dynamic rhythm, always in movement, of discursive constructions" (Contreras Baspineiro, 2022, p. 19).

The Latin American political landscape in general has undergone years of transformation to integrate women into leadership roles in a more equitable manner (Norris and Inglehart, 2000). Although women's participation in the political sphere has gradually increased, underrepresentation in practice is still notorious, as well as the lack of studies that address the construction and conceptualization of female political leadership. Eagly (2007) explains that female leadership is conceived as a style of political leadership characterized by elements that, despite being stereotypically feminine, are important for leadership, such as "cooperation, mentorship, and collaboration" (p. 2). This is closely related to power structures and the formal constitution of political parties, which condition women's participation as candidates and elected representatives (Khelghat-Doost and Sibly, 2020).

Both in theory and in practice, we observe how the almost symbiotic relationship between gender and politics is increasingly materializing (Luzuriaga et al., 2022). Indeed, multiple studies have attempted to understand the use of sex and gender as "primary modes of political identification" (Childs and Krook, 2008, p. 27), or even attributing a "gender consciousness" in the pursuit of a

feminist agenda through the presence of women in politics (Reingold, 2000). This opens up new areas of study, including the exploration of female populist leadership, the image representations of women leaders in social networks, and their impact on the dynamics of political representation in the region.

In short, female political leadership in Latin America is transforming traditional power dynamics, making visible new forms of symbolic representation and political strategies. The analysis of these women leaders, framed in the context of social networks, offers a lens for understanding how gender and technology interact in the political arena. This phenomenon not only challenges historical structures but also contributes to the enrichment of academic debates on leadership and political communication in the Global South.

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