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Original Article



Political feminization in Latin America: analysis of the discourses of Castro, Fernández and Rousseff

Feminización política en Latinoamérica: análisis de los discursos de Castro, Fernández y Rousseff

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ABSTRACT. Introduction. The development of women in politics allows us to visualize how feminization influences the Latin American socio-political landscape. The study's aim was to analyze the political discourses of a current president and two former presidents: Xiomara Castro from Honduras, Cristina Fernández from Argentina, and Dilma Rousseff from Brazil. Methods. A qualitative analysis was used by describing and interpreting political discourses and conducting interviews to experts. Results. Various similarities were evident between the discourses of Xiomara Castro, Cristina Fernández, and Dilma Rousseff such as the strategies employed in their discourses and the feminization in them, their most recurrent themes, their position regarding their opposition, among other aspects. Conclusion. Feminization in Latin American politics still has a long way to go because we live in societies with immutable gender roles, where masculinity bases persist.

RESUMEN. Introducción. El desenvolvimiento de la mujer dentro de la política permite visualizar cómo la feminización influencia el panorama sociopolítico latinoamericano. El objetivo de este estudio fue analizar los discursos políticos de una presidenta actual y dos expresidentas: Xiomara Castro de Honduras, Cristina Fernández de Argentina y Dilma Rousseff de Brasil. **Métodos.** Se empleó un análisis cualitativo, describiendo e interpretando los discursos políticos, así como la realización de entrevistas a expertos. **Resultados.** Se evidenció varias similitudes entre los discursos y de Xiomara Castro, Cristina Fernández y Dilma Rousseff como ser las estrategias empleadas en sus discursos y la feminización de estos, sus temas más recurrentes y su posición con respecto a su oposición, entre otras cosas. **Conclusión.** La feminización en la política latinoamericana aún tiene un largo camino por recorrer, ya que vivimos en sociedades con roles de género inmutables, donde persisten las bases masculinas.

1. Introduction

The citizenship of Latin American women was recognized for the first time in Ecuador in 1929 (Arámbula Reyes & Busto Cervantes, 2008). This was the first country in the region to distinguish the capacity of women as political actors. Today, 12 women have been elected and have held the political position of presidents in their countries. Although these milestones have marked history in Latin America, there is still a long way to go.

In Latin America, although it has been reduced, stereotypes persist that women do not have sufficient capacity to hold political office. In many cases, women in politics behave according to "gender performativity",

acquiring a feminine role which, socially, by complying with masculinist standards, is acceptable. In a certain way, it helps them rise within political life. This reality contributed to analyze the political speeches of the Honduran current president Xiomara Castro and two former presidents Cristina Fernández and Dilma Rousseff from Argentina and Brazil, respectively. It is important to understand whether the population to which their speeches were directed, their strategies and the topics used, are influenced by their gender.

2. Methods

This research had a qualitative approach, with an interpretive nature. The meaning of the speeches of three

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Latin American political figures was described and analyzed and interviews with experts were conducted.

Regarding the analysis of the context of the countries of the three figures, the following variables were considered: events that marked the context of the candidacy, the main political parties, and the political opposition. To know the similarities and differences of the speeches, their recurring themes, the population to whom they, their strategies, and the position of the political figure in relation to their opponents were analyzed.

2.1. Data source

The analysis was based on discerning various documents and previous analyzes of the political and gender context of Argentina, Honduras, and Brazil, as well as the political speeches of Cristina Fernández and Dilma Rousseff. Regarding the discourse of Xiomara Castro, there are no previous studies carried out in this regard since her candidacy is recent. Therefore, the data was based on our own knowledge, and we interviewed a Honduran expert in women's studies.

Many of the studies of the speeches of Cristina Fernández and Dilma Rousseff have made a comparison between both figures. An interview was conducted with an Argentine expert in political communication and a consultant in electoral campaigns, who have carried out studies on Dilma Rousseff's speeches, campaigns, and the effects on society. The information obtained during the interviews was compared with what was published in the literature to ensure consistency between the information obtained through the interviews and the information already published.

3. Results

3.1. Political contexts

It is essential to know the political context of the countries of Cristina Fernández, Dilma Rousseff and Xiomara Castro. This to better understand the research topic to be addressed. A country's political context is defined as the formation of agents that interfere with the political collaboration of citizens, which is not limited to the social and political characteristics of individuals (Morales Díez de Ulzurrun, 2001). Likewise, the political context is considered as the history and political culture of a country. The contexts of Argentina, Brazil and Honduras show valid similarities, forging a notion that is exposed in the numerous hardships that multiple Latin American countries show, with the passing of the years (Table 1).

 Table 1

 Political contexts of Argentina, Brazil, and Honduras.

	Argentina	Brazil	Honduras
Events that marked the context of the candidacy	-Presidency of Néstor Kirchner, and the first presidential period of Cristina Fernández, known as the presidential marriageHer first proclamations of her are characterized by her independence, self-confidence, and extensive knowledge in economics and politics (Londoño Zapata et al., 2019).	-The Workers' Party (PT) gained popularity due to people's dissatisfaction with the government of the Brazilian Social Democracy Party (PSDB). - Government of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (elected in 2002). Positive economic results and political-social projects increased his popularity and that of his party (PT) (Diniz, 2004).	-The turning point dates to the coup d'état in 2009 to the government of Manuel Zelaya RosalesThe National Party (PN) rises to power in the 2013 elections. It was the winner in elections characterized by the emergence of new political-electoral movements.
Main political parties	The Front for Victory, the party of Cristina Fernández and Néstor Kirchner, is a center-left coalition (Alcántara, 2018).	-System polarized into two coalitions: the PT (leftist) and the PSDB (center-right) (Rome, 2006).	-Two-party system: PN, conservative right and the Partido Libertad y Refundación (LIBRE), leftist.
Political opposition	-Frente Amplio Progresista, a party led by Hermes Binner, a democratic and progressive left-wing coalition Center for Municipal and Provincial Studies (CEMUPRO, 2011)	-Much of the rivalry between these parties and their coalitions persists in the ideological difference (Sousa Braga et al., 2016).	-The dismemberment of the Liberal Party gave rise to the bipartisanship between the PN and LIBRE. In the 2017 elections, the Opposition Alliance against the Dictatorship emerged, changing the political game.

3.2. Gender in politics

To obtain a different approach to politics, it must be analyzed using a gender perspective. Lamas (1996) has established that there is some confusion about what it means to employ a gender perspective, since many "make the mistake of thinking that talking about gender, or a gender perspective is referring to women or the perspective of the female sex" (p. 4). These are not issues related only to women, gender affects both women and men, so it could be said that when a gender perspective is used, masculinist concepts are left behind and the contexts are understood from a relationship between both sexes (Lamas, 1996). It is recognized "...that one thing is sexual difference, and another thing are the attributions, ideas, representations and social prescriptions that are constructed taking that sexual difference as a reference" (Lamas, 1996, p. 8). When understanding the gender perspective, it is imperative to analyze politics from this perspective. Latin American cultures are highly masculinized and there are many obstacles in the women political path (Figure 1).

3.3. Political discourse in Latin America

Women in Latin America have gone through various obstacles to obtain opportunities for representation in the political sphere of their societies. However, a critical reflection must be maintained, since, despite the recent and growing feminization of politics, the entrenched and reproduced masculinist cult persists, largely due to the discourses used. To begin to question these practices, it

must be recognized that Latin American societies are unequal. These inequalities are reproduced in institutions and in all spheres (Lamas, 1996), even linguistics.

As Aranda (1992) establishes, women provide a "helpful touch" in politics when they hold office. When some women come to exercise leadership, they show characteristics that fall within a feminine act. They are empathic in the face of interpersonal conflicts and tend to favor appeasing or peaceful solutions. On the other hand, authors such as Rettig (2020), McGinley (2009) and Paredes (1990), point out that when women reach high positions, they tend to become masculinized. Many times, they get to "compensate" for their imagined softness and submission. Regardless of whether women fall on a feminine or a masculine act, they must fall on gender performativity in order to be political actors (Fernández Poncela, 2008). Gender discourse and acts are generators of power, as described in Figure 2.

In the words of Ferreira (2013) it can be concluded that:

The formal consecration of women's citizenship is insufficient to achieve effective access to elective and partisan positions. The social situation of women, the sexual division of labor, the traditional exclusion of women from the public sphere, the prevalence of patriarchal-type family structures, among many other factors, explain why the formal recognition of equality is not enough to produce automatic effective equality (p. 4).

Law of Quotas

Argentina: 1991, Brazil: 1995, Honduras: 2000

Honduras. Women's suffrage was won in 1955. Women's social standing, their political exclusion, the sexual division of labor and masculinists structures explain that the recognition of formal equality was not enough to achieve it.

Argentina. Women vote for the first time in 1951. Law N°13.010 established that women would have equal political rights, obligations, and standing to those of men.

Despite the existence of the Law of Quotas, female candidates are placed last. Candidates with more chances to be elected must handle the totality of their office because a party may be able to win all of them.

Brazil. Feminist movements see the State as a starting point for action. Despite the Law of Quotas, men still dominate politics. Political party structures are an obstacle for the feminization of politics because of their weak institutionalism.

Figure 1. Gender context in Honduras, Brazil, and Argentina.



Figure 2. Representation of gender performativity in terms of power.

3.4. Similarities and differences between the political speeches of the electoral campaign of Cristina Fernández, Dilma Rousseff and Xiomara Castro

The recurring themes in Cristina Fernández's speeches were based on the achievements obtained during the presidency of her husband, Néstor Kirchner. This was her strategy, so consequently, her speech was directed at her sympathizers, and at the middle class. In the case of Dilma Rousseff, her recurring themes were based on exposing her personal profile and her competence, and on continuing projects, addressing both Lula da Silva's supporters and her biggest critics. The continuity of Lula da Silva and adapting to gender performativity were the strategies used by her.

Xiomara Castro's speech included recurring themes around the fight against corruption, and repeal of the Employment and Economic Development Zones (ZEDES). Her strategies were based on populism, referring to the results and background during the presidency of her husband, Manuel Zelaya, and other similarities observed in other Latin American countries with leftist tendencies (Table 2).

Regarding how the gender stereotype influenced political speeches, Xiomara Castro appealed to the message of empowering women, seeking labor impartiality, and reducing the degree of impunity for violence against women. Cristina Fernández questioned gender roles through advertising spots, especially after the death of her husband, Néstor Kirchner, where opposition media portrayed her as a weak woman incapable of holding office without the help of her spouse.

Dilma Rousseff showed herself as a female with a strong and rigid bearing, characteristics that were criticized and that resulted in a reformulation of her image, later appearing with a more charismatic countenance. Dilma Rousseff was even considered as the mother of Brazil by the media. However, even though these three presidential candidates presented an image of female empowerment, a recurring theme in their political speeches was always the reminder that there was a male

figure who supported and reinforced her candidacy (Figure 3).

4. Discussion

Political discourse is the imminent tool used by any political character within the global context. It is the optimal way to transmit its promises and ideologies to the population. This discourse has become the seed of an electoral process to reach a resolution and safeguard social welfare. Within our study, each presidential speech represented the rise to power of female politicians in their respective states. The strategies used by the presidents were to discredit their main opposition, position their image and figure as the representation of continuity and the improvement of the projects and policies of their main backers: male figures.

As a common denominator in the speeches of the three presidents, we can highlight the fact that all of them, in economic and social aspects, highlight positive aspects that occurred during the presidency of the men who supported them: Néstor Kirchner, in the case of Cristina Fernández, Lula da Silva, in the case of Dilma Rousseff and Manuel Zelaya, in the case of Xiomara Castro. This appealed to the continuation of the policies and projects of his previous co-religionist.

There is a diverse variation of the methodology undertaken by Cristina Fernández, Dilma Rousseff and Xiomara Castro to the segments of their population. The Honduran population that voted for Castro was mostly characterized by a lower-middle class population and was driven by the young segment that supported his presidential appointee, Salvador Nasralla. These populations were the same to which his speeches were addressed. A similar case was that of Dilma Rousseff, who adapted her speeches and personality according to the conservative and middle class of Brazil, targeting a popular segment already benefited by Lula da Silva's economic model, promising her continuity in the campaign.

 Table 2

 Similarities and differences between political speeches.

Candidate	Cristina Fernández	Dilma Rousseff	Xiomara Castro
Political discourse recurring themes	-Achievements obtained during the presidency of Néstor Kirchner and his first presidential term: economic expansion, energy subsidies, transportation, public services, and a universal assistance program for citizens in poverty called Universal Child Allowance-AUH (Cherny, 2011).	-His profile and competence: to convince the population that he did have the technical skills and suitable personal profileInfrastructure and political-social projects: proposals for the organization of the basic system, and new and continuing projects of Lula da Silva (Panke, 2015).	-Combat corruption and impunityEconomy: on the economic indicators that had reached worrying levelsTax matters and labor market: open more job opportunitiesZones of Employment and Economic Development (ZEDES): repeal of this law.
Population to whom the political discourse is directed	-Sympathizers of Peronism: Kirchner represented a Peronist movement, under the name of Front for VictoryMiddle class: direct beneficiaries in economic matters under the Kirchnerist policy, who enjoyed a stable exchange rate. Expert 1	-Popular sector: population satisfied with the economic situation under the Lula governmentMost conservative and middle-class sector: most critical of its ability, so it resorted to demonstrating its profile and skills, and discrediting the competition.	-Low- and middle-class segment of the population: speeches aimed at the country's working class, promising to eradicate the discouraging figures and removing the country from the lists of the most unequal nations in the Western Hemisphere. It also targeted the unemployed segment of the population.
		Expert 2	Expert 3
Political discourse strategies	-Continuity of the legacy of stability and economic prosperity, under the government of Néstor Kirchner. This was reflected in his speeches, television spots, storytelling, among others.	-Continuity of the Lula government, being the greatest guarantee of itGender performativity to mold the image of him in the "mother" of Brazil (Lula being the "father")Discredit the main opposition in its televised propaganda.	-PopulismReferences to the background and results of her husband, Manuel Zelaya, during his government periodDiscursive similarities with other Latin American countries with moderate and progressive leftist tendencies.
		Expert 2	Expert 3
Position in relation to political opponent	-Hermes Binner obtained the lowest percentage of votes recorded by opposition candidates, in the last ten elections in the history of Argentina. Kirchner faced a fragmented, weak, and poorly positioned opposition. Panke et al., 2015 and Expert 1	-José Serra of the Brazilian Social Democracy Party was the main opponent. -Both used speeches of continuity to the government of Lula da Silva. -None were charismatic, so, by themselves, they were not good on campaign.	-The National Party was his biggest opposition, being the face of this Nasry Asfura, better known as "Daddy to order"He was charged with embezzlement of public funds and money laundering in 2021Campaign based on proposing improvements in the educational system, health, development, and infrastructure.

Presence of a masculine figure in their respective political discourse

Xiomara Castro. Discourse was centered on women's empowerment, lowering femicides, and increasing labor equality. Presented herself as the "mother" of Hondurans. Discourse also revolved around destroying the stereotype of a male president. Expert

Cristina Fernández. Néstor Kirchner's death created ideal conditions for a new public image. The opposition portrayed her as a fragile woman, incapable and lonely, which put her abilities in question. Challenged gender stereotypes and the role women are supposed to play in society (Pérez, 2019). Despite her theme of strength, TV spots aired images of her husband as a communication strategy with a personal plea. Expert 1

Dilma Rousseff. Strong public image because of her political career. Recognized as a competent technocrat, which characterized her as rigid and uncharismatic. Adapted her image to one more "suitable" for women in politics; more feminine and approachable which cast her as the "mother" of Brazil. Expert 2

Figure 3. Feminization of political discourse

Cristina Fernández, of the three presidential candidates, had the most solid base of voters. Likewise, similar to Rousseff, she endorsed the results and favored by the economic model that Kirchnerism had brought.

Cristina Fernández, Dilma Rousseff, and Xiomara Castro used the strategy used of the results obtained by the male figure represented in their electoral campaign. Dilma Rousseff used as a basis the economic stability obtained by the policies employed by Lula da Silva. Xiomara Castro appealed to the positive data under the presidency of her husband, Manuel Zelaya. Cristina Fernández made a call to the achievements obtained since the presidency of her husband, Néstor Kirchner, emphasizing how she would continue using similar economic policies, hoping to obtain better or equal results.

Cristina Fernández, Dilma Rousseff and Xiomara Castro used a male figure to give greater credibility, and reinforce, in the case of Cristina Fernández, her position as a woman by opting for a high political position such as the presidency. In the Latin American region, the presence of a man in politics is not questioned as critically as the presence of a woman. Of the three political speeches analyzed, the change in the strategy used by Dilma Rousseff in her electoral campaign in 2010 stands out. Before starting her campaign, she was perceived by Brazilians as a woman, although competent for the position, but very cold, rigid, and hard (Dantas, 2019). Dilma Rousseff had to adjust her political discourse to anew character that was maternal, likeable, accessible,

and feminine. Together with Lula da Silva's constant support and approval, she had a greater chance of being victorious in the electoral contest. Although this is an example that stands out within the speeches analyzed, it does not mean that it is the only one. This practice of conforming to gender roles, using gender performativity to approach power, is used by many people globally.

Regarding their political opposition, Dilma Rousseff, and Cristina Fernández did not have the same magnitude of opposition, as was the case of Xiomara Castro in Honduras. Both won their respective elections with a wide margin and with massive popular support (Carletta, 2011; Tribunal Superior Electoral, 2011) due to different coalitions presented in Argentina and Brazil that ended up weakening electoral resistance. On the contrary, Xiomara Castro showed more difficulties regarding her political opposition; she went through two unsuccessful electoral campaigns and a series of alliances to gain popular support. Finally, she achieved victory in 2021, favored by the punishment vote of the population against the National Party, which had been in power for 12 years generating national discontent with corruption scandals linked to organized crime (Morazán, 2021).

In the feminization of political discourse, the fact that both Xiomara Castro and Dilma Rousseff sheltered under the image of a man to reinforce and give credibility to her candidacy stands out. In the case of Cristina Fernández, she used the death of her husband as a base strategy. These men were key in the political speeches of the electoral campaign of the three women candidates. Likewise, it is worth highlighting the fact that, although Xiomara Castro and Dilma Rousseff share the strategy of sticking to gender performativity, which allowed them to climb the power game by showing themselves to be charismatic and maternal. In the case of Cristina Fernández, she was not questioned for being a woman with a strong and egocentric personality and she did not have to apply any gender strategy in her political discourse. Cristina Fernández limited herself to resorting to the motto of strength as a synonym for female empowerment.

In contrast to Dilma Rousseff, gender aspects in politics occurred very differently with Cristina Fernández and Xiomara Castro in Argentina and Honduras, respectively. Cristina Fernández, for example, should not have resorted to adapting to gender regulations to monopolize the vote of a greater percentage of the population. She was always seen, from her time as deputy and senator between 1989 and 1995, as a rigid, pragmatic, and even egocentric woman before the media. These qualities did not affect her electoral campaign.

In the case of Xiomara Castro, she did not have to resort to adapting her image and person to gender roles as such for being the wife of Manuel Zelaya, former president of Honduras and the face of the Libre political party. She was never seen as a strong figure or "out of the norm and expected" for a woman. Xiomara Castro, in her 2021 electoral campaign, was questioned only because of her technical abilities to hold the position of president. She was not questioned on gender grounds.

5. Conclusion

Latin American politics include a predominant dominance of masculinist culture, as the only stereotypically accepted national leading figures. The vigorous image of men in politics has become a daily cycle, relegating women with political aspirations to the need to adapt to the standards imposed by society. Despite the progress shown within the region in recent years, there is a prevalent overwhelming inequity within the political arena, with the number of women parliamentarians or in high positions in government administrations becoming increasingly scarce. A predominant phenomenon in the three political discourses studied is that of societies with immutable gender roles. Despite the positive results of the political speeches of the three presidents analyzed, the masculinist bases continue to vibrate. This indicates that the feminization of politics still has a long way to go.

6. Author Contributions

AF, IV and LC designed the study and collected the data. LCA supervised the study and advised the coauthors. All authors read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

7. Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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