How Women Become Executives Around the World?  
The Path of Activists

Lisa Hager (Assistant Professor, South Dakota State University)  
Evren Celik Wiltse (Associate Professor, South Dakota State University)

Paper prepared for the  
International Studies Association (ISA) 59th Annual Convention  
April 4-7, 2018  
San Francisco, California

Abstract  
The existing literature has identified three relatively distinct paths to power for women who occupy top executive seats in politics: family, political career, and political activism. Women with male family members (i.e., fathers, brothers, or husbands) who hold high ranking political office are more likely to become presidents or prime ministers. However, more often than coming from a political dynasty, women reach the top political seats after extensive professional or political careers. They illustrate a successful track record either as technocrats or as elected legislators, governors or cabinet members. The third group, which is the focus of this paper, has a less traditional path to political power. In most cases, their political experience stems from political activism. These women leaders have typically participated in independence or democratization movements, or other progressive causes in the early stages of their political careers. Important but underexplored research questions are: (1) are there any common characteristics among the activist women leaders who were able to gain access to political power in vastly different regions of the world; and, (2) what factors contribute to the longevity of their time in office? This paper is based on biographic data from over 60 women presidents and prime ministers around the world. It tries to combine systemic/institutional factors with individual characteristics that help carry these women to the top executive seats.
In the last decades, progressively increasing number of women claimed the top political seats across the world. From the first elected female Prime Minister of Sri Lanka in 1960, nearly 70 countries had women presidents or prime ministers by the end of 2017 (Pew Research). This process is not confined to the economically well off, advanced democracies in Northern Europe and North America either. Studies highlight the increasing access of women to political power in Africa (Nauer, 2016;), Latin America (Htun 2002; 2016; Reyes-Housholder, 2016), Pacific region (Zetlin, 2014), and Europe (Jalalzai, 2014).

Scholars tend to hesitate attempts to draw generalizations from the existing universe of women political leaders. Montecinos argues that the universe of women leaders is as of yet “small and highly diverse”, therefore the potential of new cases added to this pool might have significant chances to “alter the existing patterns.” (2017, 1) Despite such methodological precautions, there are studies that cast a wider net and conduct their analysis of women political leaders on a global scale (Jencik, A. et. al. 2005; Jalalzai, 2013; Martin, Janet M. & MaryAnne Borrelli, 2016). When we look at the distribution of cases worldwide, it appears that no region is left without a woman occupying the top political seats. These large-N studies also highlight some common paths to power among women leaders.

In a larger project, we argue that it is critical to include all cases of women who have occupied the top executive posts in their countries, in order to better recognize the most common paths to power, as well as the institutional circumstances that influence each path. Our analysis combines the individual paths of women presidents and prime ministers with the political structures that they operate in. It combines detailed biographies of women prior to their ascendance to power along with country level data and information on key political institutions.

Given the frequency and the distribution of cases across the world regions, we argue that it is possible to observe some distinct patterns as to where and how women can claim the top seats. In many cases, women leaders display an impressive track record. They have very successful careers as professionals, technocrats or elected politicians. Therefore, in many cases, we encounter the overlapping of two or more paths to power.

In order to clarify the distinctions among different paths, we decided to focus on the earlier career paths of these women. This way, we tried to identify the main political capital that propelled these women under the spotlight in the initial stages of their political career. In some cases, we encountered leaders whose family members were assassinated, which forced them to political exile. Eventually, they were able to effectively mobilize enough support and resources to return to their homelands, and claim the top political office. While this might initially look like an activist path to power, we ask the following question: Would any women, without a dynastic last

1 http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/03/08/women-leaders-around-the-world/
name would have had the same opportunities for office in that particular society? What was the initial impetus that drew this woman into politics? Was it her activism, or was it her intimate personal ties to political power? Consequently, our analysis has fewer activist women than some of the other studies on this subject. Some of the key findings from our project are as follows:

- Almost all women who claim the top seats have elite backgrounds. But some of them have the advantage of coming from dynastic political families. Those who follow the “family path” to power are not randomly distributed across the world. More often than not, they are located in post-colonial societies where traditional bonds remain strong, and the levels of socio-economic development are low. (Jalalzai, 2013) This group constitutes nearly 20% of our dataset. Examples include India, Pakistan, Philippines, Thailand, and Sri Lanka.

- Nearly three quarters of women who claim the top seats do not have any family names to fall back on. They start on a “political career path” and work their way up either as elected representatives and ministers, or as technocrats and judges. The political career path seems to be dominant in not only in advanced democracies, but also in many of the developing countries. Examples include Australia, Norway, Ireland, Jamaica, and Costa Rica.

- In our dataset, we noticed that there is a distinct group of women who had to fight their way to power. Women who chose the “activist path” dedicated their political careers to causes such as promoting independence, democracy, labor rights, human rights, women’s rights or LGBT rights. About 10-12% of all women leaders fall into this category.

**Chart 1: Distribution of 131 Cases: Elected, Appointed & Interim Women Leaders & Paths to Power among Elected Women**

Sources: Official government websites of each country, Jalalzai, 2013, and Encyclopedia Britannica
This paper focuses on the third category in our research: political leaders who have started their political careers on an activist political path. It offers an in-depth analysis of the women who were able to claim the top political seats by way of this contentious path to power. Our analysis pays particular attention to how women come to power and how long they stay. This way, we can distinguish between women who ran competitive electoral races from women who are appointed to their seats, or who served in an interim capacity. When a distinction is made according to how women come to power and for how long they stay, we observe very different patterns among different countries. We believe including the terms in office, as well as clarification on how women assumed office (election, succession, appointment or interim capacity) would offer us clear insights about the dynamics surrounding women executives.

**MAP 1: Global Distribution of Elected & Appointed/Interim Women Leaders**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>COUNTRY</th>
<th>REGION</th>
<th>SUCCESSION</th>
<th>1st YEAR in OFFICE</th>
<th>TIME in OFFICE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 PRES. Pereira, Carmen</td>
<td>Guinea-Bissau</td>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>Interim</td>
<td>1984</td>
<td>2 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 PRES Johnson Sirleaf, Ellen</td>
<td>Liberia</td>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>Elected</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>12 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 PRES Banda, Joyce</td>
<td>Malawi</td>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>Appointed</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>2 years 1 month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 PM Toure, Aminata</td>
<td>Senegal</td>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>Appointed</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>10 months</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Map Author:** Mark McLaughlin, student at South Dakota State University, Geography & Political Science Departments, using ArcMAP 10.5.1
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Term Type</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>PM Meir, Golda</td>
<td>Israel</td>
<td>Middle East</td>
<td>Elected</td>
<td>1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5 years 3 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>PM Pintasilgo, Maria de Lourdes</td>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>Interim</td>
<td>1979</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>PRES Finnbogadottir, Vigdis</td>
<td>Iceland</td>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>Elected</td>
<td>1980</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>PRES Barbara, Agatha</td>
<td>Malta</td>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>Appointed</td>
<td>1982</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>PRES Dreifuss, Ruth</td>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>Elected</td>
<td>1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>PM Tymoshenko, Yuliya</td>
<td>Ukraine</td>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>Appointed (2)</td>
<td>2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>PM Sigurdardottir, Johanna</td>
<td>Iceland</td>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>Elected</td>
<td>2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>PRES Gueiler Tejada, Lidia</td>
<td>Bolivia</td>
<td>Latin America</td>
<td>Interim</td>
<td>1979</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>PM Charles, Eugenia</td>
<td>Dominica</td>
<td>Latin America</td>
<td>Elected</td>
<td>1980</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>PRES Chamorro, Violeta</td>
<td>Nicaragua</td>
<td>Latin America</td>
<td>Elected</td>
<td>1990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>PRES Bachelet, Michelle</td>
<td>Chile</td>
<td>Latin America</td>
<td>Elected (2)</td>
<td>2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>PRES Rousseff, Dilma</td>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>Latin America</td>
<td>Elected (2)</td>
<td>2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>PM Han, Myeong-Sook</td>
<td>South Korea</td>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>Appointed</td>
<td>2006</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**MAP 2: Global Distribution of Women's Paths to Power:**

**Why Activism?**
Women executives who have activist backgrounds in our database usually were engaged in what Sidney Tarrow calls *contentious collective action* (Tarrow, 1996: 2). These are not necessarily extreme or violent actors. Most of them become part of social movements, or are the founders of such movements, largely because they do not have easy and regular access to political institutions. Tarrow defines four key attributes of social movements: *common purpose, collective challenge, solidarity,* and *sustained interaction with elites, opponents and authorities.* (Tarrow, 1996: 4)

What motivates these women to engage in this rather risky path to power, rather than following a steady career in politics on their way to top executive seat? Three theoretical approaches may answer this question. While some of them prioritize the psychological motivations as the driving forces, others highlight the availability of resources, such as funds, networks, etc. that can give rise to collective activism. A third approach brings in the political variables, by emphasizing the role of critical political openings that generate a window of opportunity for activism to thrive.

### 1. Psychological Model:
This model highlights emotional distress, outrage, or burst of feelings as the main factors that activate women. This outburst could be caused by a turmoil in society due to severe conflict or war, which then might lead to increasing sense of confusion and alienation. Similarly, rapid economic development or industrialization may also trigger psychological reactions, such as feelings of alienation. Individuals then react to this by coming together and fighting to reach a sense of “normalcy”. (Henderson & Jeydel, 2014: 40).

The example Henderson & Jeydel use for psychological model is the case of Nigerian women activists. Outraged by exploitation in the hands of Chevron, they take over the oil plant and strip naked until their demands are heard. (Henderson & Jeydel, 2014: 36-52)

In our database, probably one of the best examples for this category is the Presidency of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf.

### 2. Resource Mobilization Model:
This model emphasizes the importance of material and non-material resources in order to realize a viable movement. People, funds, space, as well as a strong support network and alliances with other powerful actors are key factors that help the formation of social movements. According to Tarrow, both ideology and organizational structures are crucial components of the resource model (1996).

Among examples to this model are rising feminist movements in the US during the 1960s and 1970s. They were mostly initiated by middle-class women who were well

---

educated, and had financial security. However, they were expected to fulfill stereotypical gender roles as wives and mothers. (Henderson & Jeydel, 2014: 41) Improved economic conditions in the US in the post-WWII era, President Kennedy's initiatives for gender equality, and the rising awareness for equal rights across the nation all helped provide substantial resources for the feminist activists of this era.

In our database, probably the two cases that best fit under this category are from Iceland. President Finnbogadotti, who was in power for 16 years, had an extensive track record of activism. At the age of 41, she was the first single woman in Iceland to adopt a child. Subsequently, Prime Minister Siguroardottir, who was elected eight times, became the first openly gay leader. Iceland has a strong tradition of feminist movements, and an actual feminist political party going back to the early 1980s. Certainly these organizational resources had significant role to elevate such high profile activists to the top political seats in Iceland. Today, it ranks among the top countries in terms of gender parity.

3. Political Context/Opportunity Model: Not all the psychologically motivated, resourceful activists can launch an effective social movement. This model highlight the critical importance of having the right political moment to launch the movement. The political climate “needs to be amenable” to activism and protest. (Henderson & Jeydel, 2014: 43). Usually, times of political turbulence can help the activists. When the status quo is shaken, it might lead to a window of opportunity, and this might offer the necessary circumstances to propel activist women to leadership positions.
BIOGRAPHIC INFO:

1. Golda Meir, ISRAEL
Activist during youth, Kibbutz settler, close ties to communism, appointed as ambassador to Moscow, among original signatories of Israel's Declaration of Independence. Founder of Israeli Labor Party. Roots in leftist activism, but later had an extensive political career.

From Britannica:
In 1921 she and her husband, Morris Myerson, immigrated to Palestine and joined the Merḥavya kibbutz. She became the kibbutz’s representative to the Histadrut (General Federation of Labour), the secretary of that organization’s Women’s Labour Council (1928–32), and a member of its executive committee (1934 until World War II). During the war, she emerged as a forceful spokesman for the Zionist cause in negotiating with the British mandatory authorities. In 1946, when the British arrested and detained many Jewish activists, including Moshe Sharett, head of the Political Department of the Jewish Agency, Goldie Myerson provisionally replaced him and worked for the release of her comrades and the many Jewish war refugees who had violated British immigration regulations by settling in Palestine. Upon his release, Sharett took up diplomatic duties, and she officially took over his former position. She personally attempted to dissuade King Abdullah of Jordan from joining the invasion of Israel decided on by other Arab states.

On May 14, 1948, Goldie Myerson was a signatory of Israel’s independence declaration, and that year she was appointed minister to Moscow. She was elected to the Knesset (Israeli parliament) in 1949 and served in that body until 1974. As minister of labour (1949–56), she carried out major programs of housing and road construction and vigorously supported the policy of unrestricted Jewish immigration to Israel. Appointed foreign minister in 1956, she Hebraized her name to Golda Meir. She promoted the Israeli policy of assistance to the new African states aimed at enhancing diplomatic support among uncommitted nations. Shortly after retiring from the Foreign Ministry in January 1966, she became secretary-general of the Mapai Party and supported Prime Minister Levi Eshkol in intraparty conflicts. After Israel’s victory in the Six-Day War (June 1967) against Egypt, Jordan, and Syria, she helped merge Mapai with two dissident parties into the Israel Labour Party. Although in retirement thereafter, she remained an important political figure. Upon her death it was revealed that she had had leukemia for 12 years. Her autobiography, My Life, was published in 1975.

2. Carmen Pereira, Guinea-Bissau
(1936-2016)Phenomenal Liberation War Heroine, Politician, and First Female Head of State in Africa. The Legend Shall Never Die. R.I.P.
Carmen Pereira became a legend, engaged as mother, soldier, leader, only female member of the Comité Executivo da Lute (Executive Committee of the Struggle)
during the prolonged war of independence, speaker (president) of the People’s National Assembly (ANP), and brief head of state (May 1984) – the first female president in Africa!
Carmen Pereira came from a relatively privileged family, with a father who was one of the very few African lawyers in Portugal’s colonial empire in Africa. She joined the Partido Africano da Independência de Guiné e Cabo Verde (PAIGC) in 1962 and, together with her husband, became underground nationalist activist. In 1964, to avoid arrest, and with her husband having already escaped detention by the notorious Polícia Internacional e de Defesa do Estado (PIDE), she left Bissau with her children to engage full-time in the armed liberation struggle being waged by the PAIGC from neighboring Guinea-Conakry, under the visionary leadership of the legendary Amilcar Cabral. As one of the few women liberation fighters with a high school education, she was sent by the PAIGC to the Soviet Union for political education training.

3. Ellen Johnson, LIBERIA
She became known for her personal financial integrity and clashed with both heads of state. During Doe’s regime she was imprisoned twice and narrowly avoided execution. In the 1985 national election she campaigned for a seat in the Senate and openly criticized the military government, which led to her arrest and a 10-year prison sentence. She was released after a short time and allowed to leave the country.

Time In Exile
During 12 years of exile in Kenya and the United States, during which time Liberia collapsed into civil war, Johnson Sirleaf became an influential economist for the World Bank, Citibank, and other international financial institutions.

4. Joyce Banda, MALAWI
(street market lady!)
Britannica: “Her personal experience in an abusive marriage shaped her evolving career in grassroots activism and politics”
BBC has made history becoming Malawi’s first female president and only the second woman to lead a country in Africa, has a track record of fighting for women’s rights. She took power over the weekend following the death of 78-year-old President Bingu wa Mutharika, who died in office after heading the southern Africa country since 2004.
Mr Mutharika’s decision to appoint her as his running mate for the 2009 elections surprised many in Malawi’s mainly conservative, male-dominated society - which had never before had a female vice-president.

She will never be president, how can a mandasi [fritter] seller be president?
Callista Mutharika, Malawi’s former first lady
Equally surprising was her decision to publicly stand up to her boss - by refusing to endorse his plans for his brother, Foreign Affairs Minister Peter Mutharika, to succeed him as president in 2014 when he was due to retire.
She was promptly thrown out of the ruling Democratic Progressive Party - and subjected to daily doses of derision at public rallies and on Malawi’s state airwaves. A senior ruling party official openly said Malawi was "not ready for a female president", while First Lady Callista Mutharika said Mrs Banda was fooling herself that she was a serious politician - saying she was a mere market woman selling fritters. "She will never be president, how can a mandasi [fritter] seller be president?" Mrs Mutharika said.

Joyce Banda fell out with the late President Bingu wa Mutharika. Mrs Banda took all this in her stride, saying she was glad to be identified with market women since more than 80% of Malawian women belong to that category: "Yes, she’s right, I’m indeed a mandasi seller and I’m proud of it because the majority of women in Malawi are like us, mandasi sellers."

She also resisted calls for her to resign as the country’s vice-president - she was elected not appointed so she could not be fired by Mr Mutharika - and instead set up her own People’s Party.

Born in 1950 in the village of Malemia near the southern town of Zomba, Joyce Hilda Ntila was the eldest in a family of five children. Her father was the leader of Malawi’s police brass band and her youngest sister, Anjimile, ran pop star Madonna’s charity Raising Malawi until it closed in December. She left her first husband in 1981, taking her three children with her, because he was abusive.

"Most African women are taught to endure abusive marriages. They say endurance means a good wife but most women endure abusive relationship because they are not empowered economically, they depend on their husbands," she told the BBC about her decision.

Eight years later, Mrs Banda founded the National Association of Business Women, a group that lends start-up cash to small-scale traders - making her popular among Malawi’s many rural poor. That work also earned her international recognition - in 1997, she was awarded, along with former Mozambican President Joachim Chissano, the US-based Hunger Project’s Africa Prize for Leadership for the Sustainable End of Hunger.

She also set up the Joyce Banda Foundation, a charity that assists Malawian children and orphans through education - she has a degree in early childhood education.
“The evidence gathered raises reasonable suspicion that the Former President committed offences relating to abuse of office and money laundering,” the statement added.

The case in question, the ‘cashgate’ saga, is on record as the country’s biggest financial scandal. It is said to have involved loss of about $250 million. Malawi police are said to have asked for INTERPOL’s assistance in arresting Mrs Banda who is currently out of the country. She has yet to comment on the arrest warrant.

The 67-year-old served as the country’s president between April 2012 to May 2014. She is founder and leader of the People’s Party which was established in 2011. She had previously served as vice-president to late president Bingu wa Mutharika. She took over power after her boss died in office but she heavily lost 2014 elections to incumbent Peter Mutharika.

5. Aminata Touré, SENEGAL
Women’s rights activist, advocated for family planning in a majority Muslim country, Appointed to her position, and could stay for less that 1 year.

Guardian: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/sep/05/senegal-prime-minister-aminata-toure

She has spent all of her adult life working as a human rights and women’s rights activist, who has worked in Senegal and around the world on women’s issues and, more generally, at the intersection of social and economic justice struggles.

Until Sunday’s appointment, Touré was Senegal’s justice minister. In that role she became well known, and largely popular, for far-reaching anti-corruption campaigns that reached deep, far, wide and high into the previous government’s ranks. She brought Karim Wade, son of the previous president, to trial and then to prison. She oversaw the arrest of Chad’s former president Hissène Habré and made sure the subsequent trial wouldn’t be delayed for decades.

Since adolescence, Touré has been an activist, a militante, and a footballeuse who played for the Dakar Gazelles. At university, Touré worked with the Communist Workers’ League. Since then, her militancy has turned to family planning, both in Senegal, Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, and around the world, working most recently with the United Nations Population Fund. At the UNFPA, Touré was chief of the gender, human rights and culture branch. There, she pushed and pulled to get all sorts of people, agencies, governments to begin to think and act more seriously about "gender mainstreaming". Touré understood that, from the state perspective as well as from an analytical point of view, women’s reproductive rights are part of the governmental budget process, and so the two have to be synthesised. She has argued that women’s empowerment and gender equality are key to any kind of health programme. She has said that access to health is a human right, and that that human right is first and foremost a women’s right. Repeatedly, she has shown the world that, if not another world, then a better world is possible ... now.

In her new cabinet, Touré appointed Sidiki Kaba as the new justice minister. Kaba is the former head of the International Federation of Human Rights. His appointment
has already come under attack because of his support for decriminalisation of homosexuality. So, he's got something going in his favour. While Senegalese women's groups have hailed Touré’s promotion, they also note with some dismay the mathematics of her cabinet: four women, 28 men.

It's an important and newsworthy moment for Senegal and beyond, unless of course you rely on the Anglophone press. There, in the land of all the news that fits to print, nothing happened in Senegal. But something is happening. A feminist, women's rights, reproductive rights, human rights activist with a history of accomplishments has become prime minister: Aminata Touré.

Senegal’s Prime Minister Aminata Toure has been sacked after her ruling party’s poor results in local elections last Sunday, a media report said Saturday. According to officials, Senegal’s President Macky Sall asked Toure to stand down, after less than a year in office, BBC reported.

Aminata Toure became the prime minister Sep 1, 2013, and and is the second woman prime minister of Senegal. On Friday, she was dismissed as prime minister by parliament following her failure to win a seat from Dakar in Sunday's local elections. President Macky Sall signed a decree saying that Toure’s functions have been terminated.

6. Eugenia Charles, Dominica, (PM)
She supported US invasion of Grenada alongside Ronald Reagan. Referred as Iron Lady of the Caribbean. While a trailblazer herself, first woman lawyer, established the main opposition, and served as the unmarried, childless leader, politically she was very conservative. Can be a good example of women who themselves plough their way in politics, but rule with a firm hand, mano duro, iron fist, etc. and do not necessarily endorse the entire package of progressive, feminist political agenda

Britannica: Charles became politically active in the late 1960s, after the Dominican government passed legislation limiting dissent. She was selected to be head of the new Dominica Freedom Party, a broad-based political party comprising diverse opposition groups, which she helped found in 1968. Charles was appointed to the legislature in 1970, and in 1975 she won a seat to the House of Assembly and became leader of the opposition. When the Dominica Freedom Party won the 1980 elections, Charles became prime minister. Also serving as her own foreign affairs and finance and development minister, Charles fought government corruption, attempted to limit tax evasion, and rejected overtures from foreign business interests to legalize casino gambling on the island. She also cultivated close relations with the United States, urging and supporting that country’s invasion of Grenada in 1983. Known as the “Iron Lady of the Caribbean,” she won two additional terms as prime minister, in 1985 and 1990, before retiring when her party was ousted in 1995.
In the 1960’s, Eugenia began campaigning against restrictions on press freedom. She helped to found the Dominica Freedom Party in 1978, and was its leader from the early 1970s until 1995, helping Dominica to gain independence from Great Britain in 1978.

In 1980, Eugenia became the Prime Minister of Dominica. The Dominica Freedom Party swept the 1980 elections in their first electoral victory. She immediately began programs of economic reform, and measures to end corruption. For her uncompromising stance on this and other issues, she became known as the “Iron Lady of the Caribbean”. She was also considered to be a brilliant lawyer and politician, and was determined to preserve the island’s ecology and national identity.

After her retirement in 1995, she took on speaking engagements around the world, and became involved in former US President Jimmy Carter’s Carter Center, which promotes human rights and observes elections.

Guardian obituary : trailblazer, first women lawyer in Dominica After university in Toronto, she went to the London School of Economics, was called to the bar and returned home in 1949. The first Dominican woman to become a lawyer, she set up a successful chambers in Roseau, specialising in property law.

She was drawn into politics in the 1960s to counter what she saw as the dangerous activities of the ruling party - by this time Dominica was self-governing, achieving independence in 1978 - who were planning what became known as the "shut your mouth" bill to silence criticism and outlaw the opposition. In 1968, with broad political support, she helped form the Dominica Freedom Party (DFP): and she entered the House of Assembly as a nominated member after the 1970 election. She became an MP for the DFP in 1975 and spent the 1970s in opposition, using her legal training to good effect in parliament where she weathered the personal attacks - the mepuis - with much dignity, often calling the ruling party’s bluff. When a dress code act was introduced by Prime Minister Patrick John, Charles attended parliament in a bathing costume to draw attention to the government’s absurd posturings.

An isolated woman in politics, she faced up heroically to opponents who abused her because she was unmarried and childless. Despite this, she never really identified with feminist issues or gave Caribbean women, who carry many burdens, particular consideration.

During the early days of her rule, she survived various attempted coups - one orchestrated by Patrick John with, bizarrely, the help of Ku Klux Klan mercenaries - and did not flinch. Once she calmly locked the door to her office and walked out by the back entrance while members of the Defence Force, which she later disbanded, came for her up the front stairs.

Her years in power found a swing to conservatism among Caribbean politicians, with whom she found common calling. She was a leading proponent of Caribbean unity, which made faltering progress during the 1990s. Internationally, too, her reputation was high: politicians and officials found her manner refreshingly forthright. What she said in her deep bass voice was always to the point. She was an effective lobbyist, trawling the globe for aid to sustain Dominica’s banana-
dependent economy: thanks to her hard work, impoverished Dominica had the best roads in the English-speaking Caribbean and living standards improved. A plinth on the grandly named Dame Mary Eugenia Charles Boulevard, in effect Roseau's promenade, bears the words: "Thank God, the British were here."

But as her rule went into its second decade, she lost favour at home, scraping back into her third term with a one-seat majority. Her fearlessness - a much-needed quality in difficult days - turned into a certain arrogance in more peaceful times and a refusal to listen to the grassroots. Her emphasis on "concrete and current" (roads and electricity) development, in tune with the structural adjustment programmes enforced by the US at the expense of social welfare and jobs, diminished her popularity.

She had also done little to break down the stratified colour-consciousness of the island. As one Dominican calypsonian put it, describing her days in power: "Instead of salvation we were enslaved by the bourgeoisie." She ruled the island in the manner of a head teacher of a staid girls' school, where good manners, hard work and godliness counted for more than vision, experiment and community. Many loved her, but these did not include the poor nor the intellectuals - she enjoyed Mills & Boon novels, which she would exchange with her coterie of women friends. Yet she was rarely stuffy, never encouraged the notion of a cult of personality and had little time for what she saw as Mrs Thatcher's affectations. During her years in office, she would see constituents and visitors in her modest office or on the sweeping verandah of her family home, Wall House. There she would sit in a battered wooden chair, her shoes kicked off, watching a miniature TV set and eating chunks of sugarcane. It was a tribute to Dame Eugenia - as she became in 1991 - that outside just a single bored and sleepy policeman stood guard.

After retiring from government in 1995, she became involved in President Jimmy Carter’s election monitoring organisation, the Carter Centre, undertook speaking engagements, largely in the US, but mainly, as her memory faded, stayed at home, in a flat overlooking one of Roseau’s main shopping streets, chastising ("they're all bloody fools") her successors as they toiled in a less rewarding economic atmosphere to carry on her prudently conservative politics.

Mary Eugenia Charles, politician, born May 15 1919; died September 6 2005

7. Vigdis Finnbogadottir, Iceland (President)
First democratically elected woman president in the world. Elected in 1980, served 16 years till 1996. Divorced, adopted as a single mom at 41, first women to do so. Studied French, hirsty of theater, English. 1960s, 1970s, participated in protests against US military presence in Iceland. Protests included marching for 50 km. to protest NATO military base in Iceland. Worked as artistic director of Reykjavik Theater Company. Women’s movement strong in Iceland: famous strike in the 1970s for equal pay. 90% of women participated in the strike. When she ran as woman’s movement candidate in 1980 elections, she won by a very slim margin 33.6 % to 32.1%. At that time, women only made up 5% of the

But then in 1984 elections, 4 years later, she ran unopposed!

President’s role in Iceland: largely ceremonial. But her activism also visible, she took up previously neglected causes, ex: environmentalism & cultural rights, promotion of girl’s education.

From National Geographic:

“Never try to be a man if you’re a woman” Finnbogadóttir told us dryly. “You have to realize that the world was so late in discovering the head of the woman.” She told us about the times she met Ronald Reagan and when Pope John Paul II said how excited he was to see a female president. Hillary Clinton once came to Iceland, too. [http://onward.nationalgeographic.com/2013/10/24/coffee-with-a-woman-who-changed-iceland/](http://onward.nationalgeographic.com/2013/10/24/coffee-with-a-woman-who-changed-iceland/)


After Finnbogadóttir made history in 1980, female political participation in Iceland soared, leading it to become the most gender-equal parliament in the world among countries without a quota system. Even after a sharp drop following a snap election in October, women still make up 38.6% of the governing body – and this month feminist Katrín Jakobsdóttir emerged as its new prime minister.

It’s no coincidence that last year Iceland was ranked the most gender equal country in the world by the World Economic Forum – for the ninth time – and the Economist recently named it the world’s best place for working women.

By contrast, after the 2016 election, the US dropped from 52nd to a dismal 104th in the world for women’s political representation. [Today, women hold just 19.6% of the seats in Congress](http://onward.nationalgeographic.com/2013/10/24/coffee-with-a-woman-who-changed-iceland/) – 21.0% in the Senate and 19.3% in the House of Representatives.

A historical look at key policies in the nation appears to back this up. In the 1990s, full-time, highly subsidised daycare became available for all children aged two and older after the election of several parliamentarians from the Women’s Alliance, a women-centred political party, and the election of Finnbogadóttir the decade before.

The next big push came after the 2008 financial crisis, which saw Iceland’s banking system collapse, creating a severe economic depression. In the election that followed in 2009, women took 43% of the seats, and Jóhanna Sigurðardóttir became the country’s first female prime minister – and the world’s first openly lesbian head of government.

“But because things were such a mess in 2009, the increase in women went almost unnoticed,” says Heiðar. “But we went from being a ‘normal’ democracy to a gender-equal parliament overnight – it was a fantastic victory.” The country briefly achieved gender parity in 2016, 101 years after Icelandic women first got the vote.

In the years that followed, new laws introduced quotas for women on company boards, a ban on strip clubs and the purchase of sex, the removal of perpetrators of
domestic violence from the family, and a recent push to make employers prove equal pay.

Female political representation empowers other women at the top of other fields too, says Sigríður Björk Guðjónsdóttir, Reykjavik's first female chief of police. Since ascending to the post in 2014, she has made violence against women and girls a priority.

Iceland’s 1975 Women’s Day Off, which experts cite as a momentous event in the fight for women’s rights.

On that day, a fifth of the country’s female population, about 25,000 women, gathered on the streets of Reykjavik to protest about low pay, lack of political representation, and domestic drudgery. At the same time, an estimated 90% of Iceland’s female population went on all-out professional and domestic strike throughout the country. “It was a turning point for everybody,” says Styrkársdóttir.

Evren: it seems like the women in Iceland fit the “activist” path ☺ they are everywhere, from parliaments to police stations, and they push for a more just and equitable society.

8. Johanna Sigurdardottir Iceland, Prime Minister

Born 1942, went to vocational school, worked for years as an Iceland Air flight attendant. But very back then, as a member of the labor union, twice served as the Chairman of the board of Icelandic Cabin Crew Association. That activism got her in Parliament in 1978. Served in influential posts as minister for several times, including in “powerful” ministerial positions, such as Foreign Affairs and Economy.

Entered politics from Social Democratic ranks, but later formed her own party, got 4 seats, then merged with social democrats again. So takes initiative, not afraid to splinter from her own party.

Married, had 2 boys, divorced, came out as lesbian. Entered a civil union with long time partner, in 2010, Iceland legalized same-sex marriage, she got married. Got elected as PM Jan 2009, right after economy of Iceland crash landed in 2008. Huge economic crisis.

Personality: very private person, does not make her sexual choices as a big issue.

Iceland: ranks as #1 of World Economic Forum’s Global Gender Gap Index.

Political Syste of Iceland: Parliamentarian, real power rests in the parliament. Total of 3 center left parties: Social democrats (1916), People’s Alliance, and a Women’s Alliance party, established in 1983. Together, 3 of the form the social democratic alliance in the parliament.

Pro-women initiatives: in 2010: banned strip clubs. Paying for nudity banned in Iceland, first in the world. Says women are equal citizens, not commercial objects for sale.
9. Agatha Barbara, Malta, President

Agatha Barbara, President Trailblazer, activist, pushed for women’s rights within Labor Party. Women couldn’t vote in 1940s Malta. She founded Women’s branch for the party and women’s political movements.

Elected as 1st MP among 40 members of parliament. Was pro-education.

Imprisonment under British rule: Jailed for picketing for education and social reforms. In 1958 relations between the British and the Maltese deteriorated. Protests erupted in the streets and Mintoff resigned. Barbara participated in the demonstrations and was sentenced to 43 days "with hard labour".

Later served as minister of Labor, Culture and welfare, expanded worker rights, introduced law on equal pay, paid maternity leave, 40 hrs work week

Never married.

10. Ruth Dreifuss, Switzerland, President

https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/dreifuss-ruth from Jewish Women’s Archive:

An outspoken and strong feminist, Switzerland’s first Jewish member of the Federal Government and first woman president Ruth Dreifuss was born in St. Gall in Eastern Switzerland on January 9, 1940.

Involved in politics as a member of the Social Democrat Party since 1965, she was elected in 1981 as general-secretary of the Swiss Federation of Trade Unions—the first woman in this position—dealing with social insurance, labor laws, promotion of women’s rights and relations with the International Labor Organization (ILO).

For ten years she held the post of Minister for Domestic Affairs, presiding over extensive reforms in health, social security and pension services. A strong advocate of women’s issues, Dreifuss fought for general paid maternity leave, which was finally introduced into federal legislation in September 2004. During her time in the Swiss cabinet, Switzerland became a full member of the United Nations. She also took an active role in the process of investigating Switzerland’s role during World War II and in the discussions between Switzerland, the World Jewish Congress and the American authorities regarding funds of Jewish Holocaust victims held in Swiss bank accounts.

In 1997 she served as Vice President of the Swiss Federal Council and in 1999 took over as President of the Swiss Confederation—the first woman and the first Jew to hold this office. This was considered a significant personal achievement in Switzerland, where women received the right to vote only in 1971 and which was the last country in Western Europe to recognize Jewish rights. The office of Swiss President rotates among the seven members of the Federal Council and is held for one year, in addition to the normal activity as a minister. Ruth Dreifuss resigned from the Federal Council at the end of 2002.

From Brandeis university: Dreifuss’ climb to the Swiss presidency was uncommon and remarkable. Her ideals and political goals shape a leader of character and strength. Concentrated on the politics of gender equality, education, maternity,
abortion rights, sports, and the environment, Dreifuss has transformed the lens of Swiss politics. http://people.brandeis.edu/~dwilliam/profiles/dreifuss.htm

11 Maria de Lourdes Pintasilgo, PM of Portugal
http://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/maria-de-lourdes-pintasilgo-550094.html Obituary in Independent: Maria de Lourdes Pintasilgo was Portugal’s sole female prime minister and only the second woman to be prime minister of any European country.

She was active to the end, reflecting in recent weeks the Portuguese people’s growing rejection of its government’s alignment with the US and the UK in the Middle East. She praised the Spanish decision to bring back its troops from Iraq and called on the conservative government in Portugal of José Manuel Durão Barroso to follow Spain’s example and withdraw its military from the occupation force.

This pioneer feminist who achieved distinction in academia and business moved steadily leftwards from the primitive Fascism of the dictator Antônio de Oliveira Salazar in which she was brought up. A woman who escaped being pigeonholed by refusing membership of any political party, Pintasilgo has been mourned across her country’s political spectrum.

Apart from the enormous work she did for women’s rights, her main achievements included some success in narrowing the yawning gap between believers and unbelievers in Portugal. On the one hand lay an often ultra-conservative and obscurantist Catholic church led by dyed-in-the-wool bishops who were as close to the Salazar dictatorship as many Italian and Spanish bishops had been to the ideas of Mussolini and Franco. On the other lay politicians loyal to the sometimes stridently secular values of the republic. A committed Catholic with progressive views, Pintasilgo was seen as dangerous by many senior churchmen, but, such was the countrywide respect she commanded, they had to accept her.

She was born in 1930 in Abrantes, in the Tagus Valley, to Jaime Pintasilgo, who was in the wool business, and his wife Amélia. Maria Pintasilgo early showed signs of her exceptional qualities. Sent at the age of seven to the Liceu Filipa de Lencastre in Lisbon, she distinguished herself in the Mocidade Portuguesa, Salazar’s avowedly Falangist youth movement. Pintasilgo went on to join Ação Católica (Catholic Action) and, in her university years at the capital’s higher technical institute, the Catholic women’s student movement, which she eventually led.

In 1953 she graduated with an engineering degree in industrial chemistry. In a country where opportunities for women were few and despite her love of philosophy, she opted for a "man’s subject" so as to demonstrate the abilities of women. In the year after her graduation, she joined Companhia União Fabril, the "CUF", the large Portuguese conglomerate with interests in cement plants in Portugal and throughout the colonies. There she rose to become project director before leaving in 1960.

Meanwhile Pintasilgo had made contact with Graal (the Grail), an international Catholic women's association which she helped to establish in Portugal - despite the opposition of the ultra-conservative Cardinal Manuel Cerejeira, Patriarch of Lisbon, who was an intimate friend of Salazar. In the 1960s she became one of the Grail’s
leading international figures. From 1960 to 1974 she became the first woman
member of Salazar's Câmera Corporativa, one of the advisory organs of the
dictatorship.
In 1971 Pintasilgo went into battle for feminism in the Three Marias case when a
provocative anti-Fascist work of feminism, The New Portuguese Letters, landed its
authors, Maria Velho da Costa, Maria Teresa Horta and Maria Isabel Barreno, before
the courts of Marcelo Caetano, Salazar's successor.
With the overthrow of Caetano by the Armed Forces' Movement in the "Carnation
Revolution" of 1974 Pintasilgo was appointed Minister of Social Affairs in the first
provisional government and two years later dispatched to Paris to become
Portugal's first envoy to Unesco.
In 1979 she was called on by General António Ramalho Eanes, the President, to
become Prime Minister. This post she occupied until the first weeks of 1980 and she
pushed hard to modernise the primitive social welfare system which Salazar and
Caetano had bequeathed. She left her mark by making social security universal and
improving health care, education and labour legislation.
With support from the non-Communist left she put herself forward unsuccessfully
as an independent candidate for the presidency in 1986 but with Socialist Party help
At home in the world of culture, theology and chemistry, she went on to hold her
own in many international scientific, economic and religious bodies from the Club of
Rome to the OECD and the EU to the UN University. In the 1980s, the military asked
Pintasilgo to arrange a meeting through the Indonesian embassy in London with
General Suharto whose troops were conducting a murderous occupation of what
had been the Portuguese colony of East Timor. The attempt came to nought.
She retained a moderate distrust of her male colleagues in the rough macho trade of
international politics remarking once to a friend, "You know, they never forgive me
for having dared to enter their world."
She did not marry, but was never regarded as a narrow-minded spinster. Rather
was she seen as a chubby, humorous person of great charisma and wide interests
with a broad mind and a zest for life.

12. Yulia Tymoshenko, PM of Ukraine:
BBC: A heroine of Ukraine's Orange Revolution, Yulia Tymoshenko is one of
the country's most high-profile political figures and a key candidate in its
presidential election.
She was freed in February after spending three years in jail for criminally exceeding
her powers, charges that she says were politically motivated.
The glamorous, fiery orator helped lead Ukraine's revolt against a corrupt
election in 2004, gaining international recognition.
She became prominent in 2004 during the Orange Revolution, when she and her ally
Viktor Yushchenko packed the streets of Ukraine in protest at a rigged election that
went in favour of the pro-Russian Mr Yanukovych.
The Supreme Court ruled in their favour, and the Orange alliance took power on a
firmly pro-Western, anti-Russian platform.
No sooner had they taken over, with Tymoshenko as prime minister and Mr Yushchenko as president, than their relationship turned sour. Her supporters have always seen Yulia Tymoshenko as a glamorous revolutionary challenging a corrupt, macho political elite. Her stinging attacks on the oligarchs who prospered under the pre-Orange Revolution administration of Leonid Kuchma boosted her popularity among many Ukrainians frustrated by years of economic stagnation and corruption. But critics point out that she made a fortune of her own. She was born in 1960 in the industrial city of Dnipropetrovsk, in the mainly Russian-speaking east, which is now a stronghold of Mr Yanukovych.

**Nick-named: “gas princess”**

She trained as an engineer and economist in the east and, when the Soviet Union broke up, sought to take advantage of the business opportunities that emerged. In the mid-1990s she formed United Energy Systems of Ukraine, which helped supply gas to Ukraine's huge industrial base. By some estimates, she became one of the richest people in Ukraine. She was nicknamed "the gas princess".

Like many tycoons in Ukraine, she sought to become involved in politics, and became part of Mr Yushchenko's government in 1999-2001, pushing through energy sector reforms. But she fell out with then-President Leonid Kuchma, and after being held in prison for a month on corruption charges, she made it her goal to unseat him, launching a campaign that reached its climax in the Orange Revolution.

---

Britannica: During the events of the [Orange Revolution](/search?q=Orange+Revolution), Tymoshenko was a key figure, passionately denouncing Viktor Yanukovych’s presidential election campaign and the alleged electoral fraud that resulted in Yanukovych's victory being overturned. After Yushchenko was installed as president, he named her prime minister in January 2005. Her cabinet was dismissed nine months later, however, after fractious disputes with the head of the Security and Defense Council and her controversial attempts to reprivatize companies that had been sold at less than market value.

[P4]

The BYT formed the main opposition after the collapse of the pro-Western Orange coalition in the summer of 2006 and finished in second place in the 2007 parliamentary campaign. On October 15, 2007, Our Ukraine–People's Self-Defense and the BYT agreed to form a majority in the new parliament, and on December 18 Tymoshenko regained her position as prime minister. By this time the most recognizable figure in Ukraine, she campaigned for changes to the constitution that would transform the country into a parliamentary republic.

[P5]

By May 2008 Tymoshenko was engaged in a direct contest for power with President Yushchenko. The conflict over authority between the presidency and the parliament presaged a serious [constitutional](/search?q=constitutional) crisis. As the two former allies clashed over various issues—for instance, while the president maintained his pro-Western stance and focused on gaining membership in [NATO](/search?q=NATO), the prime minister was accused of
being overly supportive of Russia—their governing coalition collapsed in September 2008. Tymoshenko remained in her post pending new parliamentary elections. [P6]

Tymoshenko continued as prime minister after the parliamentary elections scheduled for December 2008 were canceled and a new coalition between Yushchenko’s and Tymoshenko’s parties was formed. Running for president in the January 2010 election, Tymoshenko came in second place in the first round of voting, with about 25 percent of the vote. A runoff poll between Tymoshenko and the first-place contender, Yanukovych, was held on February 7. Although Tymoshenko garnered 45.47 percent of the runoff vote, Yanukovych received 48.95 percent and was declared the winner. Calling the results fraudulent, Tymoshenko refused to recognize Yanukovych’s victory. Nevertheless, Yanukovych was inaugurated as president on February 25, and the following week Tymoshenko’s government was felled by a vote of no confidence. [P7]

Subsequent investigations into her prime ministership—notably into the 2009 deal she signed to purchase natural gas from Russia at allegedly inflated prices—resulted in Tymoshenko’s being charged with abuse of power. Her trial began in June 2011, and in October of that year she was sentenced to seven years in prison. The trial was widely criticized both domestically, where it was viewed by some as an attempt by Yanukovych to discredit Tymoshenko, and abroad, where some contended that procedures were not in accordance with international standards. In November 2011 Tymoshenko faced new charges, including tax evasion and embezzlement, that dated from the 1990s. [P8]

In February 2014, after three months of popular protest in Kiev and several days of bloody crackdowns by the government, an agreement was reached between Yanukovych and opposition leaders. On February 21 the parliament approved numerous measures related to the agreement, including a rollback to the 2004 constitution, thus limiting the powers of the president. It also decriminalized the statute under which Tymoshenko had been convicted, and she was released from prison the following day. She immediately traveled to Kiev, where she was warmly received by the protest camp in the city’s Maidan (Independence Square). After Yanukovych was impeached by the parliament and fled to Russia, Tymoshenko’s political ally, Oleksandr Turchynov, was appointed interim president. Tymoshenko was an early favourite in the snap presidential race that was scheduled for May 2014, but popular support soon coalesced behind Ukrainian business leader Petro Poroshenko. In that contest, Tymoshenko finished a distant second, with Poroshenko capturing more than the 50 percent necessary to win the election in the first round.

13. Lidia Gueiler Tejada, President, Bolivia

Bolivian politician (born Aug. 28, 1921, Cochabamba, Bol.—died May 9, 2011, La Paz, Bol.), was the first woman to serve (1979–80) as president of Bolivia and only the second to hold that high office in the Western Hemisphere (after Argentina’s Isabel Perón). Gueiler became a member of the Nationalist Revolutionary Movement
(MNR) in 1948, and three years later she cemented her reputation as a social rights activist by leading 26 women on an eight-day hunger strike to win the release of their sons and husbands, who were being held as leftist political prisoners. She was an active participant in the 1952 revolt to oust Bolivia’s military leadership, but after the military overthrew the MNR-led government in 1964, she was imprisoned and then forced into exile upon her release. Following her return to Bolivia, Gueiler was elected (1979) president of the Chamber of Deputies and, later that year, president of Congress. Her eight-month term as interim president of Bolivia ended in another military coup, after which she served as ambassador to Colombia (1983–86) and Venezuela (1992–2001).

Independent Obituary: Her job was to prepare for new democratic elections but she found herself presiding over some of her nation’s most unstable and violent times after a 25 per cent devaluation against the dollar and rising prices of petrol and basic foodstuffs. Before elections could take place she was overthrown in another bloody military coup – a typically Bolivian family affair led by one of her cousins – on 17 July 1980. Needless to say Raquel Welch was not involved: the man wielding the guns was another cousin, General Luis García Meza Tejada. Gueiler, after three months of asylum within the Papal Nunciature, or embassy, in La Paz, was forced to flee into exile in Paris. She returned only in 1982 after the military dictatorship collapsed. It is thought unlikely that she ever visited her cousin García Meza in jail, where he is still serving a 30-year sentence for horrific human rights violations. In fact, she had personally testified against him before the Supreme Court. Venezuela, and for a time as a Senator, Gueiler retired from public life in 1993, although she continued as a human rights campaigner and supported the former coca farmer Evo Morales in his successful presidential campaign of 2005.

Gueiler first shot to prominence, notably among Bolivian women, in 1951 when she led a hunger strike by 26 women, mothers or wives of leftist political prisoners. After an eight-day fast the prisoners were released. In April the following year she took to the streets during Bolivia’s popular revolution of 1952, which got rid of the military rulers of the time. After another coup, by General René Barrientos in 1964, she was jailed, tortured and released only under condition that she leave the country. After a spell with the Revolutionary Party of the N National Left (PRIN), Gueiler presided over a particularly difficult time in Bolivian history when relations between the armed forces and civilians were at their lowest level. Her mission was mainly to hold power until a new round of elections on 29 June 1980 could determine the next constitutional president. The elections went off as scheduled, but Gueiler could do little to prevent disgruntled sectors of the armed forces tied to drug traffickers from launching a coup on 17 July 1980 that ended Bolivia’s return to democracy. Gueiler spent the next two years in exile. When democracy returned to Bolivia in October 1982, Gueiler was named ambassador to Colombia and later served as ambassador to Venezuela. She published her autobiography, Mi pasión de lideresa, (My Passion as a Leader) in 2000.
14. Rousseff Brazil

15. Bachelett, Chile

16. PRES Chamorro, Violeta

LA times: The GREAT CONCILIATOR : President Violeta Chamorro Reconciled Nicaragua's Warring Armies. But Can She Deliver Anything Else?
INDEPENDENCE DAY, last Sept. 14, the leader of war-weary Nicaragua staged a ceremonial farewell to arms. With a deafening clatter, 15,000 rusting automatic rifles slid from 10 dump trucks into a pit dug along the shoulder of the Pan American Highway in Managua. With funereal solemnity, President Violeta Barrios de Chamorro tossed red flowers one by one onto the guns, and concrete poured from a hose to seal the giant tomb.
"We are burying these weapons so that peace can shine in our country," Chamorro declared. The U.S.-backed Contras had surrendered their weapons after an eight-year insurgency. The Sandinista army, now under her orders, was trimming ranks and collecting guns from its civilian supporters. "Here," she told the TV cameras, "we will build an enormous monument for peace, to show the world that Nicaraguans want no more bloodshed."
For such a hopeful milestone, the setting was bleak. On either side of the highway, weed-covered lots and the hulks of buildings testified to the poverty of a capital city unable to rebuild since the 1972 earthquake. From the slums amid the ruins, about 200 onlookers had gathered to watch the show. They listened impassively, offering restrained applause.
Then, after Chamorro led the singing of the national anthem and turned to leave, the audience suddenly came alive. As she walked away, they converged on her, shouting affectionate saludos and desperate appeals--for jobs, medicine, better housing, cheaper food. "Thank God we have peace, Dona Violeta, but when can we eat?" cried a young woman wearing a torn dress and holding the hand of her barefoot child.

Chamorro never stopped. Smiling and waving behind a line of aides and security guards, she ducked into her chauffeur-driven Volvo and rode away.
The ceremony and its aftermath provide a telling glimpse of the woman who last February became the first Nicaraguan president chosen in open, competitive elections. Nearly a year after upsetting incumbent Daniel Ortega of the Sandinista National Liberation Front with 55% of the vote, Chamorro is still popular among Nicaragua's 3.7 million people as the conciliatory mother figure who ended their deadliest war. Yet, in a nation plagued by poverty and political instability, she seems maddeningly aloof, without meaningful solutions to any postwar problem.
Now her government appears adrift in a storm of hardships and criticism. Chamorro has chosen to rule by preaching a single guiding principle--national reconciliation--which has brought her into collaboration with the Sandinistas while her own 14-party coalition, the National Opposition Union, howls in protest. She has been unable to stem increasing crime and feuds over farmland as idled soldiers from both
sides scramble to make a living. The long recession inherited from a decade of Sandinista rule refuses to end. And as the battle against inflation has stripped away price subsidies, the poor have gotten poorer.

And Dona Violeta can only offer hope:
"The people believe that I have a wand of virtue, and that, like Aladdin and his lamp, I can make everything marvelous. They have to understand that I received a country in bankruptcy... a disaster. But I do not lose hope that this country, in a year, or two years, or three years, is going to be completely better. We Nicaraguans put up with 50 years of dictatorships... We have to have a little patience, no?"

WELCOMING a visitor to her second-floor office in the downtown skyscraper Casa Presidencial, the 61-year-old Chamorro is eager to show how she has brought the room to life since Ortega's departure. "He left it empty except for a beat-up desk and four rocking chairs," she says, her brown eyes scanning the space warmed by potted plants from her garden. There are 12 rockers now, for informal meetings, and a long table for Cabinet sessions. Ortega's desk was replaced after a rough edge tore the president's dress. So were the violet chair cushions that she suspects Ortega had installed as a joke on her name. Photos of Pope John Paul II and her late husband, Pedro Joaquin Chamorro, now adorn the walls, beside crucifixes and framed newspaper headlines proclaiming her election.

With equal attention to style, Chamorro is trying to put her stamp on public life and government in Nicaragua. Black tie has replaced the tropical guayabera at official receptions, widening the fashion gap in a country where thousands of combat veterans have nothing to wear but tattered olive fatigues. Secretaries at Casa Presidencial no longer sport miniskirts or address visitors as companero, the preferred Sandinista greeting, but as senor or senora. And the Roman Catholic Church, treated with coolness and suspicion by the agnostic Ortega, is back in the mainstream.

Pedro Chamorro, so vocal and visible a foe of the regime, was murdered by Somoza thugs in 1978, becoming one of the chief martyrs of the evolving Sandinista revolutionary movement.

-----

Chamorro, undeterred by her husband's death, continued, with her newspaper, to help lead the opposition to Somoza, calling for a return to democracy. When Anastacio ("Tachito") Somoza, Jr., fled the country in 1979 in the face of a popular uprising, she was honored with membership in the powerful Sandinista Governing Junta. Dedicated as she was to the ideals and practice of democracy, Chamorro quit the Sandinista Junta within a year and began speaking out against its Marxist rhetoric and increasingly authoritarian rule.

Once again in opposition, she and La Prensa led the attack against the supposedly popular, but soon dictatorial and incompetent, regime, labeling Daniel Ortega and other Sandinista rulers as "Los Muchachos" ("The Boys"). Careful not to align herself openly with the anti-Sandinista guerrilla movement known as the "Contras" or with the United States, Violeta Chamorro achieved more with the pages of La Prensa than the rebels did with their bullets, and by 1988 she was the most prominent of the nation's opposition leaders. Around her figure rallied all those
disturbed by the economic chaos (35,000 percent inflation in 1988!) and the Sandinistas’ alignment with Cuba and the Soviet Union. First peaceful change of hands in Nicaraguan govt. she was the conciliator “mother”, but economy declined significantly under her watch.

17. Roza Otunbayeva, President, Kyrgyzstan

Otunbayeva was one of the key leaders of the Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan which led to the overthrow of President Akayev

Britannica: In 2004 Otunbayeva broke with former ally Akayev, accusing him of corruption and nepotism. The following year Otunbayeva formed an opposition political party, Ata Dzhurt (“Fatherland”), but Akayev’s government blocked it from participating in the 2005 elections. After Akayev was forced from power in March 2005 in the Ata Dzhurt-backed postelection revolt that became known as the Tulip Revolution, the new president, Kurmanbek Bakiyev, named Otunbayeva foreign minister. Not long after Bakiyev took power, however, Otunbayeva lost the post when the new parliament refused to approve her appointment.

Otunbayeva won a seat in parliament in 2007 as a member of the Social Democratic Party. By that time she had placed herself in outspoken opposition to Bakiyev, whom she felt displayed the same tendency toward corruption as his predecessor. In time popular opinion turned against Bakiyev as well, and the changing tide culminated in April 2010 in a violent uprising that led to his ouster. A provisional government was put into place with Otunbayeva as interim president, though from afar Bakiyev continued to claim legitimacy for his government. Initially Otunbayeva announced her intention to lead the country for a six-month period—until elections could be held—but later her government announced that she would remain in office until the end of 2011.

In June 2010 Otunbayeva’s hold on power was challenged by an outbreak of ethnic violence between the Kyrgyz majority and Uzbek minority in the south of the country, which resulted in the deaths of scores of Uzbeks and a smaller number of Kyrgyz as well as the dislocation of hundreds of thousands. Otunbayeva, however, was largely able to quell the unrest, and many credited her with bringing stability to the country. Former prime minister Almazbek Atambayev won the presidential election in October 2011, and on December 1, Otunbayeva stepped down in Kyrgyzstan’s first peaceful transfer of power.

18. Myung-Soook Han South Korea PM

Devout Christian, dissident in young age, political prisoner. Faced corruption charges, jailed for 2 years. Can be either way (career of activist) need more infor

Forbes: A former dissident who was once jailed as a political prisoner, Han
Myung-sook became South Korea's first female prime minister in April. An ardent human rights supporter, Han spent two years in prison, between 1979 and 1981, reportedly accused of spreading communist ideals to Korean farmers and peasants. A graduate of Korea's most prestigious women's university, Han served as a lawmaker in Korea's National Assembly, where she fought for women's rights on such issues as extending maternity leaves and guaranteeing payment for expectant working mothers. She has also served as Korea's Minister of Gender Equality and Minister of the Environment. Since taking office as prime minister, Han has urged German companies to invest in an economic zone shared by North and South Korea. She has also quelled domestic opposition to the expansion of a U.S. Army base near Seoul, the nation's capital. —Susan Kitchens

**Why NOTS?**

1. Georgia, PRES Burdzhanadze, Nino. She comes from an affluent family, father is a prominent businessman, she’s known to be well known, well dressed, well educated. Studied law, graduate of Moscow University, specialist on Int’l Law, has numerous publications. Was already close to president Eduard Shevardnadze. But leater moves on to opposition, very active in protests that bring down Shevardnadze. Among the architects of the Velvet Revolution. and serves as interim president Twice. But her activism during velvet revolution is Not what propelled her to politics. She was already a well known political figure, before her brief activist period. Had a steady political career and influential mentors. Political career path is more fitting for her. Activism came much later in her political career, and lasted only for a brief period. [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/3233470.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/3233470.stm)

2. Natasha Micic, Prime Minister of Serbia: Legislator; was founder of OTPOR, protest group, Speaker of the Parliament became Acting president after Milosevic was ousted from power because an acceptable replacement could not be found. From LA Times: *In one of the wilder turns in politics here, a 37-year-old woman known for outspoken democratic views and the kind of good looks that have some in the local media comparing her to Nicole Kidman has become acting president of Serbia, the dominant Yugoslav republic.*

Natasa Micic stepped into the job Dec. 31 after two presidential elections failed to draw the required number of the republic's voters to the polls. She is about as unlikely a politician for the high-profile position as can be imagined. She is also the first woman to serve in the post. Under the Serbian Constitution, in the event a president's term expires and elections fail to provide a successor, the job goes to the speaker of the parliament. Although Micic is viewed by pundits here and Western diplomats as a caretaker until a president is elected, they acknowledge that she could be in the job for a while. They also note that she is going to lead the effort to rewrite the Serbian Constitution, which could have considerable impact on the governance of the republic, potentially decentralizing power.
Wikipedia: As Milan Milutinović’s mandate as the President of Serbia expired, and two presidential elections were voided because turnout fell short of required 50%, she became the acting President of Serbia on 30 December 2002, with a constitutional obligation to call another election within 60 days of taking over the acting post. She did not do so in the required period, leading to a chorus of criticism. Following the assassination of Zoran Đinđić on 12 March 2003, a state of emergency was immediately declared under her command. By May of the same year, the situation had calmed and the state of emergency was lifted. For Mićić, however, the fall of 2003 would become a crucial period in her political career.

Firstly, on 17 September 2003, over six months after the required constitutional period expired, she finally announced a 16 November date for a third attempt at electing a President for Serbia.[2] She then experienced continuous parliamentary pressure because of the voting scandal involving DOS MP Neda Arnerić. On 16 October 2003 after the ruling DOS coalition was left without a parliamentary majority for the first time in almost three years, a motion for a no-confidence vote proceeding started for the parliamentary president Nataša Mićić.[3] The parliamentary discussion on this issue finished on 29 October 2003, but the actual non-confidence vote was postponed for a fortnight. In the end, it proved unnecessary, as on 13 November 2003, just three days before the presidential elections that would later be void again because of low turnout, Mićić dissolved parliament and called for parliamentary elections on 28 December 2003.

Family: Park of S Korea:
When Park Geun-hye became South Korea’s first female president in 2013, women’s groups saw it as little more than a superficial milestone. They had protested her candidacy, arguing that the daughter of a dictator would never represent real women. Now, with Park facing calls to resign over an influence-peddling scandal, women’s rights supporters fear her presidency has only deepened sexism and misogyny here. “Sadly, the failure of President Park Geun-hye is generating hatred against the female sex,” said Nam In-soon, who chairs the Gender Equality and Family Committee in parliament.

Gender inequality is deeply entrenched in South Korea. Women on average earn 37% less than men, the biggest gap among the 35 countries in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. At the country’s 10 biggest companies, women hold 2% of management positions, according to the market research firm CEOScore. Women make up 17% of the elected members of parliament, well below average for Asia and the world’s developed countries. Experts trace that statistic to social conditions and a lack of female role models in politics. Han Myeong-sook, a woman who became prime minister in 2006 and served for 11 months, eventually went to jail for corruption, while Park Young-
sun, who became the first female floor leader in parliament in 2014, soon quit amid political strife.

Park, the daughter of Park Chung-hee, who led South Korea from 1961 until his assassination in 1979, chaired the conservative Grand National Party — the predecessor to the ruling Saenuri Party — before running for president. She lost in her first attempt, then won five years later. It was a historic moment for women in South Korea. But whether Park really broke the glass ceiling has been a topic of debate here, centering on whether she ever represented women’s interests.

She ran on nostalgia for her father, who is largely credited for modernizing the economy through industrialization and is highly regarded by many old people in rural areas. They remember Park in the presidential Blue House, where she acted as first lady in her twenties after her mother was assassinated.

Her presidential campaign never pandered to women’s rights organizations, which fought against her father’s dictatorship and solidly opposed her candidacy. While she promised affordable child care, paternity leave and more job centers for women, those positions were not radically different from the platforms of her male rivals.

In office, she has done little to promote women in government. Just two of her 19 ministers are women. "Women’s activists generally have few positive things to say about her and certainly did not expect much change in the position of women in Korean politics and society," said Heike Hermanns, a political scientist at Gyeongsang National University. “Park Geun-hye is thus rather an outlier than a sign of progress for women in politics.”

Hermanns said the established power structures, in which personal networks play a major role, make it difficult for women to obtain higher positions. “As long as Korean politics remains personalized and relies on outsiders as party saviors, men will dominate as there are so few women who are in such a position,” she said.

Experts say the current scandal, in which her longtime friend Choi Soon-sil stands accused of using her influence with the president to extort money from businesses, has damaged women’s position in politics and society. "This situation was actually predictable from the moment she was elected president," Nam said. "If she got on well, it would probably have been assessed that it was because she is the daughter of Park Chung-hee. And if she failed — just like she did now — we knew that it would strengthen the voice of discrimination against women.”

Conservative media have criticized Choi for "unladylike" toughness, luxury tastes and her relationship with Ko Young-tae, her alleged “boy toy” and slush fund assistant.

As the 2017 presidential election nears, the country has few women who would stand much chance of being elected. Shim Sang-jung and former presidential
contender Lee Jung-hee, both parliamentary leaders of minor liberal parties, are considered too radical to be taken seriously. One exception is Choo Mi-ae, the popular chairwoman of the main opposition party, who has defied many of the country’s political and social norms, marrying a man with a disability and working with former President Kim Dae-jung despite being from a rival region.