

BOOK REVIEW ESSAYS

# The Challenges of Gender Representation in Latin America

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This essay reviews the following works:

**Gendering Legislative Behavior: Institutional Constraints and Collaboration.** By Tiffany D. Barnes. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016. Pp. viii + 274. \$34.99 paperback. ISBN: 9781316507650.

**Women, Politics, and Democracy in Latin America.** Edited by Tomáš Došek, Flavia Freidenberg, Mariana Caminotti, and Betilde Muñoz-Pogossian. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017. Pp. v + 243. \$87.00 hardcover. ISBN: 9781349950089.

**Inclusion without Representation in Latin America: Gender Quotas and Ethnic Reservations.** By Mala Htun. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016. Pp. x + 226. \$26.68 paperback. ISBN: 9780521690836.

**Women in Mexican Politics: A Study of Representation in a Renewed Federal and Democratic State.** By Fernanda Vidal Correa. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016. Pp. ix + 122. \$75.00 hardcover. ISBN: 9781498534390.

**Gender, Institutions, and Change in Bachelet's Chile.** Edited by Georgina Waylen. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016. Pp. ix + 244. \$101.64 hardcover. ISBN: 9781137501974.

Women's political representation in Latin America has grown substantially since the transitions to democracy in the 1980s, and this has occurred in many areas of government. An average of 29 percent of legislators in national legislatures in the Americas today are female.<sup>1</sup> Five of the top ten countries in the world in terms of women's legislative representation are from Latin America: Cuba (53 percent), Bolivia (53 percent), Nicaragua (44 percent), Costa Rica (45 percent), and Mexico (48 percent).<sup>2</sup> Six female presidents have been elected in Latin America since 1990, and three of those served two terms in office. Women's presence in political party executive committees averaged 23 percent in a 2009 survey of parties with representatives in national office.<sup>3</sup> In addition to this, women have made substantial gains in cabinets, among mayors, in local councils, and in state legislatures.<sup>4</sup>

The numerical growth in women's representation has brought to light a number of important questions for Latin American politics: What explains the increased representation of women? Why do some countries do better at representing traditionally underrepresented groups than others? What effect has the inclusion of

<sup>1</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), "Women in National Parliaments, Situation as of 1st June 2018," <http://archive.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), "Women in National Parliaments, Situation as of 1st February 2019," <http://archive.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> Inter-American Development Bank, "GEPPAL: Base de datos de Género y Partidos Políticos en América Latina," December 2008, <https://publications.iadb.org/handle/11319/708>; Jana Morgan and Magda Hinojosa, "Women in Political Parties: Seen but Not Heard," in *Gender and Representation in Latin America*, ed. Leslie A. Schwindt-Bayer (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 74–98.

<sup>4</sup> Leslie A. Schwindt-Bayer, ed., *Gender and Representation in Latin America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

women in government had on politics and policy making? How has their presence influenced society? Over the past fifteen years, a vast literature has developed to answer these questions. Studies have highlighted the importance of cultural, socioeconomic, institutional, and political factors for increasing the representation of women. Specifically, they have found that more progressive attitudes toward women in politics, higher educational attainment, occupational equality for men and women, proportional representation electoral rules rather than majoritarian ones, and democratic government facilitate the election of women. Now that nearly every Latin American country has adopted gender quotas for elections to national legislatures, they have studied how quotas were adopted and how effective they have been at increasing the number of women in government. Research also has examined what female representatives do in office, how their attitudes and political behavior differ (if they do) from traditional office holders, how they are treated in office, and what impacts their representation has had on policy and political reforms.

This literature has provided a number of answers to these questions about women's representation. It has highlighted the myriad actors responsible for the adoption of gender quotas, from women's movements to strategic male party elites. It has emphasized the importance of well-designed quota rules—those that do not simply specify a target representation of women on party ballots but require specific placement rules for women on ballots, emphasize gender representation on ballots rather than just women's presence, and strongly enforce the quota rules once in place. The literature has shown that women sometimes do make a difference in legislative politics by prioritizing women's equality issues, sponsoring legislation on these issues, talking about them in debates, and interacting more with female constituents, but it has also highlighted problems of women being marginalized and women bearing disproportional costs compared to their male counterparts. Finally, research has shown that the presence of women in political office is correlated with higher citizen satisfaction with democracy, women's increased interest in politics, greater support for women in politics, and other political attitudes. Although much of the research on women's representation in Latin America has focused on national legislatures, scholars are increasingly exploring women's representation in other arenas of government—the presidency, cabinets, parties, and subnational legislatures and executives.

In this essay, we review several books that provide new insights into our understanding of women's representation in Latin America. These books recognize the main contributions that the literature has already made—quotas help women get into office and women can make a difference helping to improve women's equality in myriad ways—but they push this literature further by highlighting the many challenges that women face getting elected (even when effective quotas are in place) and in accomplishing a women's equality agenda (if they have this as a priority). They focus not just on the formal institutional obstacles that women may face, which have dominated much of the research thus far, but identify informal institutions as obstacles, the need for social and cultural change due to continuing gender bias within society and political arenas, and the ways in which institutions, structures, and culture interact with one another. The books reviewed here cover a wide range of questions on women's representation, use diverse methodologies, explore political arenas beyond the national legislature, and even compare gender representation to representation of other underrepresented groups, specifically indigenous peoples and Afro-descendants. They are a highly diverse lot; yet, they share a focus on moving beyond simple questions of how quotas work, what women do in office, and how they influence politics and society more broadly, to explore the nuanced challenges and obstacles women politicians and aspiring politicians face and ways of overcoming these to improve gender representation. They thus make an impressive contribution to our understanding of women, gender, and political representation in Latin America.

In *Gendering Legislative Behavior*, Tiffany D. Barnes takes up a recurring theme that has emerged in the literature on women's legislative representation in Latin America—that women are often marginalized once elected to office. Yet that is just the beginning of her story. How women overcome this marginalization is the key point of the book. Barnes argues that one way that women overcome the marginalization they face in legislative politics is to behave collaboratively. She points out that although most democratic theory highlights the competitive nature of democracy, democracy can be collaborative. She develops a theoretical argument for collaborative democracy and how and why women may be more collaborative in their approach to legislating. Specifically, she argues that collaborative behavior provides opportunities for legislators who lack access to positions of power (e.g., women) to amplify their voices within the legislature and influence the policy-making process. Collaboration also overlaps with socialization practices that encourage women to behave more consensually and cooperatively. This not only means that women are more likely than men to collaborate, in general, but they are more likely to collaborate with their female colleagues.

With an impressive collection of qualitative interview data and quantitative bill cosponsorship data from the Argentine provinces, Barnes shows that women in Argentina are marginalized and that they behave collaboratively through cosponsorship of legislation. Barnes starts by presenting extensive evidence that women are marginalized. Compared to their male peers, they lack access to formal positions of power, such as committee chair positions, leadership posts, and powerful committee assignments. Additionally, female legislators lack equitable access to professional and social networks in the legislature. These crucial positions and networks provide legislators significant influence over policy making within the legislature; women's lack of access to these resources creates structural barriers that limit women's influence once elected.

Barnes then explores collaboration in legislatures by examining patterns of bill cosponsorship. Bill cosponsorship is a collaborative process because legislators work together to develop legislation. Barnes collected individual-level bill cosponsorship data for legislators across twenty-three provincial legislative chambers from 1992 to 2009. She complements these quantitative data with over two hundred interviews of legislators, politicians, and elite political observers to draw conclusions about the patterns of collaboration among male and female legislators within the Argentine provincial legislatures.

Ultimately, Barnes finds that female legislators cosponsor bills more often than male legislators do and are more likely to choose female collaborators. However, not all female legislators are presented with the same opportunities to work together and collaborate on legislation. Differences across parties, legislative chambers, and bills, such as the level of influence that the party has over individual legislators, the number of women elected to the chamber, whether female legislators possess seniority status in the chamber, and whether the content of the bill in question deals with women's issues, all affect whether women will be able to collaborate freely with other women to influence the policy-making process. For example, more senior female legislators have greater freedom to cosponsor with other female legislators.

Barnes' research demonstrates that collaboration is a creative way that women have found to overcome the continued obstacles of marginalization that they face in legislative politics, to influence policy, and to represent their constituent and party interests. It highlights women's empowerment and the ways that women engage in representation even when legislative institutions create disproportionate challenges for them. Barnes strikes a positive note about women's representation in Latin American legislatures. This contrasts with the much more cautionary and pessimistic conclusions drawn by Mala Htun in *Inclusion without Representation in Latin America*.

Htun broadly examines the election and legislative behavior of marginalized groups in Latin America, including women and ethnic and racial minorities. She distinguishes inclusion from representation and argues that quotas have been a method of inclusion, that is, increasing women's or minority groups' numerical presence in office, but not necessarily of representation, or acting on behalf of those groups. Like Barnes, Htun is interested in how women behave once elected to office, and whether they represent (i.e., act on behalf of) women once in political office. She explores the adoption of gender and racial/ethnic quotas in Latin America and then examines whether women represent women once elected to office via quotas in Argentina. She concludes that quotas have been important mechanisms for bringing about the inclusion of women in politics but do not always guarantee that these women represent and act on behalf of women once included.

Htun starts by showing that quotas for women in Latin America were adopted as a result of women's strategic efforts to combat their exclusion from formal access to political power. As a response to male dominance in candidate selection and the failure of more gradual cultural and socioeconomic changes to promote gender equality in representation, multiparty coalitions of women in society and politics pushed for approval of gender quota legislation. Gender quotas were intended to alter the institutions of candidate selection to address ingrained discrimination and increase women's presence in office. Electoral quotas, the most common mechanism put forward to include women in politics, were much more palatable to parties and elites than reserved seats for racial and ethnic minorities. This is why, Htun argues, gender quotas were more widely adopted than racial and ethnic quotas. Htun studies this in detail in Bolivia and Colombia. In Bolivia, gender parity was adopted but only a small number of indigenous reserved seats were created. In Colombia, reserved seats for indigenous and Afro-descendant communities were created, but they have been easily undermined, with nonminority representatives winning those seats. Importantly, electoral quotas for women and reserved seats for indigenous peoples and Afro-descendants often increase the inclusion of these groups but not necessarily their representation.

Moving to explore whether quotas have influenced women's representation in legislatures, Htun presents an analysis of bills introduced in the Argentine legislature between 1983 and 2007. She finds that women in office in the Argentine national legislature were more likely than men to represent women's interests by

sponsoring bills on women's issues; however, both women and men became more likely to do so as quotas brought more women into the legislature. Additionally, as women's inclusion in the legislature increased over time, the approval rates of bills on women's issues declined. Thus, women still appear to be marginalized in their access to institutional power and their ability to influence the policy-making process on behalf of women, even when quotas increase their inclusion. This complements Barnes's findings nicely, as Barnes essentially picks up here and explores an alternative way that women represent—through collaboration. Yet, Htun's work highlights a very important and sometimes overlooked point that Barnes would likely agree with: inclusion is not the same as representation.

A third book also addresses the question of how women represent the interests of women when they are included in and operate in an environment that often marginalizes them, yet it moves out of the legislature and into the presidency. Georgina Waylen's edited volume *Gender, Institutions, and Change in Bachelet's Chile* includes analyses by eight scholars of gender politics and Chilean politics who examine the actions of a successful and "self-made" female president in Latin America, Michelle Bachelet. The book compares Bachelet's efforts to represent women by promoting a gender equality agenda during her first term in office (2006–2010) and the first year of her second term (2014–2018), finding a mixed record of success.

The first three substantive chapters, by Peter Siavelis, Susan Franceschet, and Gwynn Thomas, respectively, explore a different part of Bachelet's governing. Siavelis argues that Bachelet's first term produced only limited success in promoting a gendered policy agenda, failed to produce a satisfactory educational reform, and did little for improving social services. He argues that a chief obstacle for her was that "postauthoritarian Chilean democracy has consistently privileged stability and governability over other elements of democracy, particularly representation, accountability, and legitimacy" (40).

Franceschet focuses specifically on gender and cabinet formation in Bachelet's Chile. She argues that while Bachelet came to power in 2006 with a campaign promise of appointing a gender parity cabinet, the informal practices and norms surrounding cabinet selection limited her success. Her first cabinet in 2006 did indeed reach gender parity, but that fell apart in subsequent reshuffles and did not occur at the start of her second term in 2014, as she had to comply more with existing norms and practices, such as proportionality in distributing portfolios to coalition members in accordance with their electoral strength, taking party and coalition leadership preferences into account, and considering candidate experience and policy backgrounds. Bachelet succeeded in introducing gender as a new norm for cabinet formation but continued to have to balance that with existing norms.

Thomas's chapter focuses on Bachelet's efforts to promote specific gender equality rules and policies through the Servicio Nacional de la Mujer (SERNAM), a women's policy agency put in place before Bachelet came to power. SERNAM was designed to address demands for improved gender equality and to promote policy change. Prior to Bachelet, SERNAM did not possess much power because it lacked executive support and was often undercut by informal practices. Under Bachelet, this changed as she strengthened SERNAM, making it a ministry during her second administration. This provided the material and institutional resources necessary to support SERNAM's operation and fully incorporate a gendered agenda within the executive branch.

The second three substantive chapters of Waylen's edited volume explore specific policy reforms that Bachelet struggled with during her terms in office—pension reform and expansion of childcare (Silke Staab, chapter 5), gender equality in the health sector (Jasmine Gideon and Gabriela Alvarez Minte, chapter 6), and reproductive rights (Carmen Sepúlveda-Zelaya, chapter 7). These authors highlight that Bachelet faced significant inertia from existing rules and norms in her efforts to generate political change. In all, Waylen's volume shows quite clearly that, similar to female legislators, Bachelet faced significant institutional constraints (both formal and informal) in promoting a gender-friendly policy agenda and implementing more gender-neutral policy reforms. She did find ways to navigate those constraints to have some success, however, much like female legislators have done.

The volumes reviewed thus far explore how women operate within institutional environments that marginalize women or significantly constrain their ability to represent women and promote a gendered policy agenda. They take women's inclusion as a given, or in the case of Htun, show how quotas have been created to help bring about the presence of women in politics, in addition to exploring action on behalf of women's interests once women are elected. The final two volumes that we review in this essay pay more attention to the ways in which quotas have been insufficient for increasing women's presence and representation, focusing on an array of cultural, societal, party-based, and political obstacles to increasing women's political participation.

*Women, Politics, and Democracy in Latin America*, edited by Tomáš Došek, Flavia Freidenberg, Mariana Caminotti, and Betilde Muñoz-Pogossian, invites a diverse group of scholars and policy experts using a variety of methodological tools to analyze the effectiveness of gender quotas in placing women in positions of power and to explore strategies beyond quota legislation to achieve that inclusion. It also examines the interaction of formal and informal institutional rules and norms that constrain women in their ability to represent women's interests once elected. Studying not just national legislatures, it represents new trends in the literature that explore other arenas of government. For example, Yanina Welp and Saskia P. Ruth (chapter 8) provide a novel examination of the use of social media by female executives Cristina Fernández de Kirchner and Dilma Rousseff.

The various chapters in the volume identify many different constraints that obstruct women's inclusion and representation in politics. Mona Lena Krook (chapter 2), for example, argues that while quotas have helped increase the number of women in some Latin American legislatures, they are not universally well implemented or successful. Other reforms are needed, as well. Changes to campaign and party finance rules and reforms to domestic violence laws are one way to help make politics and society more hospitable for women's participation. Jennifer M. Piscopo and Gwynn Thomas (chapter 5) highlight the need for "deep sociocultural changes demanded by activists" (5) and improvements in national policy agencies, such as SERNAM in Chile, as vehicles for greater representation of women's interests. Ana Laura Rodríguez Gustá and Nancy Madera (chapter 6) identify the importance of female legislators' collective action and their political networks to bring about improvements in women's rights. Moving outside the executive and legislative arenas, María del Carmen Alanís Figueroa (chapter 9) emphasizes gender-sensitive judicial processes for ensuring that women's rights policies are actually implemented properly and violations of them are appropriately punished. Similarly, Betilde Muñoz-Pogossian and Tyler Finn (chapter 10) and José Ricardo Puyana (chapter 11) highlight important roles for international agencies, such as the Organization of American States (OAS) and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), respectively, in helping to promote gender equality in Latin American elections and politics. The broad approach taken in the volume shows that policies like quota legislation alone cannot address the obstacles that women face in entering politics. Instead, other measures, such as changes to campaign finance rules and oversight from judicial and international agencies, are needed to address insufficiencies and inconsistencies in quota legislation.

Fernanda Vidal Correa's *Women in Mexican Politics* takes this idea even further while exploring women's representation specifically in Mexico. Like Barnes, Vidal Correa focuses on the subnational level, and she looks at not just state legislatures but party offices as well. She examines how the federal system in Mexico allowed states to implement their own quota legislation, which led to a widely varying set of quota rules that have produced widely varying results for the inclusion of women. The process of quota adoption itself was erratic across states, with some introducing long delays in the quota adoption process or ignoring the mandate to implement a quota entirely. In some states, laws were weak with no placement mandates for where women should be running or placed on party ballots and few mechanisms in place to enforce the quota. In others, loopholes allowed parties to evade the quota. The outcome of this was an unevenness in the presence of women across state legislatures.

The weaknesses of formal quotas are only one part of the gender inequality problem in Mexico, however. Vidal Correa argues that informal institutional constraints in politics and traditional cultural views of gender roles are significant obstacles to women's access to power. Specifically, she asserts that clientelist networks, which are common in Mexican politics, are a major constraint for women. Clientelism provides the necessary political and social capital for political office and is crucial for the internal selection of candidates to party ballots, but it excludes women. Women's lack of access to clientelistic networks thus prevents female candidates from advancing through the party and into elected political office. Vidal Correa also argues that traditional gender socialization in Mexico limits women's educational and occupational opportunities and discourages their political participation. It reinforces cultural divisions of labor that keep women in the home and focused on their roles as mothers and wives. It also ingrains patriarchal norms that socialize women to be submissive and dependent. Vidal Correa draws on mixed methods of "document search and analysis," "semi-structured interviews," and "quantitative data collection, processing and analysis" (xiv) to show how clientelism and gendered socialization work together to limit women's presence in Mexican politics, even when quotas are in place.

Vidal Correa's book reinforces the points made in several of the other books reviewed here. Gender quotas can work, and they have brought greater inclusion of women into politics by increasing their presence, yet they are often insufficient. Cultural, structural, and informal institutional obstacles, such as gender

socialization practices that discourage women's political participation, lead to unequal educational and occupational opportunities, and limit access to influential clientelist networks, continue to influence the underrepresentation of women in political office. Where countries reinforce gender inequality in "political capital," as Vidal Correa refers to women's more limited access to financial resources, media connections, policy experience, seniority, union support, and networks, women will continue to be underrepresented in legislative and party bodies.

Together, these five books highlight growing trends in the literature on women, gender, and political representation in Latin America. They go beyond examining how formal institutions have influenced women's descriptive and substantive representation to highlighting the continued formal institutional and informal cultural and structural obstacles that women face both getting into office and doing work on behalf of women once there. Those obstacles sometimes emerge from formal rules in the electoral, legislative, presidential, or party arenas themselves, but often they come from informal rules and norms, continued cultural bias toward women, or structural impediments to women. In many cases, it is an interaction of formal rules, norms, cultural biases, and socioeconomic disadvantages that affects the inclusion of women. In other words, norms, cultures, and socioeconomics sometimes mitigate or undermine the advantages that formal rules, such as quotas, provide.

Additionally, these studies have advanced the literature on women and representation in Latin America by examining political arenas beyond the legislature. Much more of this needs to be done. Courts have received little attention, and scholars have only begun to explore how gender politics plays out in local governments. Party volatility continues to make studying women in parties a challenge. But democracy, the internet, and new and innovative methodological techniques for collecting and analyzing data should help scholars better answer questions of gender representation in these political arenas, too.

Much work still remains for the study of women's representation in Latin America, but the research reviewed here offers a comprehensive examination of the recent state of women's representation in Latin America across several countries and levels of governance and provides a blueprint for future research in examining both formal and informal rules and norms.

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