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Women in Mexican Subnational Legislatures

From Descriptive to Substantive Representation

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Latin American Societies

Current Challenges in Social Sciences

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This series aims at presenting to the international community original contributions by scholars working on Latin America. Such contributions will address the challenges that Latin American societies currently face as well as the ways they deal with these challenges. The series will be methodologically agnostic, that is: it welcomes case studies, small-N comparative studies or studies covering the whole region, as well as studies using qualitative or quantitative data (or a mix of both), as long as they are empirically rigorous and based on high-quality research. Besides exploring Latin American challenges, the series attempts to provide concepts, findings and theories that may shed light on other regions. The series will focus on seven axes of challenges:

1) Classes and inequalities

The first set of challenges revolves around the creation and distribution of symbolic and material rewards across social groups and their crystallization in stratification systems. How have social classes changed in Latin America? Which are the causes and consequences of the growth of middle classes with considerable education levels which nonetheless remain vulnerable to falling into poverty due to economic crises? Why has poverty declined but inequality remained persistently high? Moving to other kinds of inequalities, have the gaps in rewards between men and women and between ethnic groups changed, and do they vary across countries? Which are the territorial expressions of inequality, and how do they affect access to housing and the formation of lower-class ghettoes?

2) Crime, security and violence

The second set of challenges stem from the persistence of violence and insecurity among Latin Americans, which consistently rank crime and insecurity at the top of their biggest problems. Crime organizations – from youth gangs to drug cartels – have grown and became more professionalized, displacing state forces in considerable chunks of national territories and, in some cases, penetrating the political class through illegal campaign funding and bribes. To this we should add, in some countries of the region, the persistence of armed insurgents fighting against governmental forces and paramilitaries, therefore creating cross-fires that threaten the lives of civilians. This results in massive human rights violations – most of which remain in impunity – and forced population displacements.

3) Environmental threats

A third challenge is related to the sources and consequences of environmental change – especially human-related change. These consequences threaten not only Latin American's material reproduction (e. g. by threatening water and food sources) but also deeply ingrained cultural practices and lifestyles. How do existing models of economic development affect the natural environment? What are their social consequences? How have governments and communities faced these challenges? Are there viable and desirable alternatives to economic extractivism? What are the environmental prospects of Latin America for the next few decades and which are their social implications?

4) Collective action

A fourth theme has to do with how collective actors – social movements, civil society organizations, and quasi-organized groups – deal with these challenges (and others). How have labor, indigenous, student, or women's movements adapted to environmental, economic and political changes? To what extent have they been able to shape the contours of their issue areas? Have they been successful in fighting inequality, patriarchy, or racism? Have they improved the lives of their constituencies? Why under some circumstances does collective action radicalizes both in tactics and goals? We welcome studies on a wide array of collective actors working on different issues, with different tactics, and diverse ideological stances.

5) Cultural change and resistance

Culture – the understandings, symbols, and rituals that shape our quotidian – has never been static in Latin America, but modernization processes have affected it in complex ways. How has religion, lifestyles and values changed under market reforms and democratization processes? How multicultural are Latin American societies, and how they deal with the potential tensions derived from multiculturalism? Which are the causes and consequences of the decline in influence of the Catholic church, the awakening of new religious identities, and the growing sector of non-religious Latin Americans? How are new digital technologies and global consumption patterns shaping Latin Americans' norms and beliefs about race, gender, and social classes? Are Latin Americans becoming "post-materialist", and if so, why?

6) Migrations

Political, economic, and environmental crises, as well as promises of better opportunities in other lands, have encouraged Latin Americans to migrate within their national borders or beyond them. While during the 1970s Latin Americans often migrated to other regions, nowadays national crises encourage them to seek other destinations in more nearby countries. What causes migration patterns and how do they affect both expelling and receiving communities? How do migrants adapt to their new residence places and coexist with native populations? How does migration contribute to social capital, national identities and gang formation?

7) Political inclusion and representation

Dealing with social and ethnic minorities constitutes one of the most recurrent and unresolved challenges for the Latin American democracies. This topic includes the representation of the minorities, but includes also the study of the socio-political elites. Hence, how women are represented in the Latin American democracies? How are indigenous and blacks included into the socio-political arena? Which policies are being adopted for increasing the inclusion of such minorities? How representative are Latin American political elites?

Both solicited and unsolicited proposals will be considered for publication in the series.

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Acknowledgments

We are convinced that democracies without women are not democracies. It is our tribute to so many *maestras feministas* (feminist masters), women politicians, activists, and women's rights advocates who fight every day to break down the obstacles women face when they want to exercise power.

Mexico City, November 30, 2021

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Abbreviations

CEDAW	Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women
COFIPE	Federal Code of Electoral Institutions and Procedures (*Código Federal de Instituciones y Procedimientos Electorales*)
IFREG	Gender Electoral Regime Strength Index (*Índice de la Fortaleza del Régimen Electoral de Género*)
INE	National Electoral Institute (*Instituto Nacional Electoral*)
Jucopo	Political Coordination Board (*Junta de Coordinación Política*)
LGIPE	General Law on Electoral Institutions and Processes (*Ley General de Instituciones y Procedimientos Electorales*)
LGPP	General Law of Political Parties (*Ley General de Partidos Políticos*)
MC	Citizens' Movement Party (*Movimiento Ciudadano*)
OPLES	Local Public Electoral Bodies (*Órganos Públicos Electorales Locales*)
PAN	National Action Party (*Partido Acción Nacional*)
PANAL	New Alliance Party (*Partido Nueva Alianza*)
PES	Solidarity Encounter Party (*Partido Encuentro Solidario*)
PRD	Party of the Democratic Revolution (*Partido de la Revolución Democrática*)
PRI	Institutional Revolutionary Party (*Partido Revolucionario Institucional*)
PT	Labor Party (*Partido del Trabajo*)
PVEM	Ecologist Green Party of Mexico (*Partido Verde Ecologista de México*)
SCJN	Supreme Court of Justice of the Nation (*Suprema Corte de Justicia de la Nación*)
TEPJF	Electoral Tribunal of the Federal Judiciary (*Tribunal Electoral del Poder Judicial de la Federación*)

Chapter 1
Introduction

Women tend to participate in politics more than men but struggle more to access public office and exercise power on equal terms. They are the ones who contribute with the most significant number of votes in elections. At the same time, they are the ones who have won the fewest candidacies, have received less political education and training, and have fewer resources to do politics. They also experience greater political violence just because they are women. Once they get into office, women find themselves overlooked, isolated from decision-making, and frequently not even allowed to promote policies that would enable them to transform women's lives progressively. Other times women themselves do not believe that, because of their gender, they are expected to legislate for a specific group (women). They prefer to devote their limited role to legislating for society, thus prioritizing other agendas and responding to partisan interests without addressing the inequalities they face as women in contemporary societies.

Despite the efforts made by the feminist movement around the world, the recognition of women's suffrage was not enough for women to be included in candidacies, to gain access to public spaces, or for public policies to reflect their interests on an equal footing with men (Schnapper 2004; Bareiro and Soto 2015). Even when they had the right to vote, they were not voted for because they never became candidates. It meant that women could exercise the vote as a legal right but had no real institutional opportunities to make their voices heard, and if they did get into office, they were seen as intruders.

The systematic exclusion of women from power and political representation (Birch 1971; Dahlerup 1988; Matland 1998; Krook 2010; Bareiro and Soto 2015) is not a minor issue. It limits opportunities to live in egalitarian and fair societies. It is even more dramatic the fact that half of the population—as is the case of women—does not participate in public decisions has not prevented political systems from being considered democracies. It did not prevent them from developing their tasks such as selecting elites, making decisions, governing, or negotiating between political forces (Paxton 2008; Tripp 2013). The emphasis on the political rights

dimension of democracy, which leads to the procedural conception of democracy, implies paying little attention to who competes and how inclusive government decisions are on agendas and interests. This implicit bias in the assessment of political systems deeply questions the very definition of democracies. Also, it negatively affects the diagnostics and strategies that need to be pursued to achieve true equality in all democracies.

The absence of women in Latin American institutions is evident. At this moment, no women are holding the Presidency in any Latin American country and there have been only 11 in the region's entire history. There are only four national parliaments with parity or more than 45% female representatives (Nicaragua, Bolivia, Costa Rica, and Mexico), so women are underrepresented in most of the region's parliaments (ECLAC 2021). The situation at the subnational and local levels is much worse. The average number of women in local executives in 19 Latin American countries is currently 15.5%. It rises only to 29.6% at the local legislative level in the more than 15,000 municipalities in the region (ECLAC 2021).

This dramatic reality—which is not exclusive to Latin America—has led women politicians, diverse women's movements, feminist collectives, electoral authorities, and international cooperation agencies to promote, as "critical actors,"[1] political–electoral reforms to change the structural inequality women face when they want to engage in politics (Matland 1998; Dahlerup and Freidenvall 2005; Martínez and Garrido 2013). Since 1991, more than 45 reforms to the gender electoral regimes have been approved by national legislatures in 18 countries in the region (Observatory of Political Reforms in Latin America 2021). Pressured by "gender-friendly coalitions" (Caminotti 2016) and under the influence of international law, women party members organized in informal networks, activists, and the broader women's movement endorsed the creation of rules to require political parties to nominate women candidates. At the same time, electoral courts and electoral management bodies, together with women's networks, academics, and the broad women's movement, demanded to eliminate the gaps and loopholes in the law that allowed political parties to fail in fulfilling gender quotas and other actions mandated by the electoral gender regime.

These efforts sought to "feminize politics" (Lovenduski 2005)[2] and build more egalitarian societies through the expansion, creation, and transformation of women's political–electoral rights (Franceschet et al. 2012; Bareiro and Soto 2015;

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[1] The idea of "critical actors" committed to the women's agenda is not a minor issue (Dahlerup 1988). This concept resolves the role of men as drivers of this agenda, which is by no means exclusive to women. Critical actors are, according to Celis et al. (2008, 102–3), "individuals who initiate policy proposals on their own or who embolden others to take steps to promote policies for women."

[2] *Feminizing politics* is understood as the process by which "the insertion and integration of women, both in terms of numbers and ideas, into a process that is important but widely regarded as unattractive" (Lovenduski 2005, 12–13). Politics "is defined as the personnel, processes, relationships, institutions and procedures that make authoritative public decisions" (Lovenduski 2005, 13). For feminists, "the political encompasses personal and private (domestic) life, which is based on unequal power relations in which men have more power than women and also have power over women. In gendered terms, political institutions mirror private institutions" (Lovenduski 2005, 13).

Archenti and Tula 2017; Schwindt-Bayer 2018, among others). These "mechanisms of democratic innovation" (Freidenberg and Muñoz-Pogossian 2019)—the set of multidimensional actions and strategies—were developed to boost women's political participation. It was expected that a "critical mass of women" (Dahlerup 1988) in office could drive public policies intended to transform exclusionary, misogynist, and discriminatory power relations.

Legal and political changes have led to an average increase of more than 33.5% in the presence of women in national legislatures (ECLAC 2021), with a significant knock-on effect at the subnational level in various countries in the region (such as Mexico). However, this shift has also posed new challenges for incorporating a multidimensional perspective in analyzing political representation. In other words, the theoretical assumption that more women in office would bring about the transformations needed to eradicate inequalities deserves to be explored empirically by looking at different dimensions of political representation, as Hanna Pitkin and other authors proposed decades ago.

Analytical efforts should look at enhancing women's presence in political institutions and what they do and how they do it once they are in office. This problem implies significant theoretical and empirical challenges. The first is how to promote conditions for exercising women's political representation as a social group in the legislative sphere (and other spheres). The second is how those women with a public voice in power can promote public policies that transform existing gender inequalities in public and private spheres. Any reflection on gender must adopt an intersectional and nonbinary perspective since current theories recognize that gender is a social construct and that some people express the identity of another gender (neither feminine nor masculine), some are gender fluid, some are neither, and there are still others who reject the mere notion of gender and gender identity (Richards et al. 2017, 5).

The social construction of gender also implies that it has been and continues to be interpreted in heterogeneous ways by different societies and over time. The roles, expectations, and norms assigned to people based on their biological sex are neither fixed nor unique. They also correspond to the diversity of interpretative and epistemological positions held by different currents of feminism and the discipline. The analysis becomes even more complex when it is recognized that even people who ascribe themselves to the same gender—for example, the female—are affected by a series of characteristics, situations, and preferences that make them highly heterogeneous groups. Social relations converge through multiple systems of hierarchization and oppression that condition their development. The inequalities intersect among each other, generating unique conditions of exclusion and inequality (Crenshaw 1991; Viveros Vigoya 2016).

Given the complexity of nonbinary gender, the scarce scholarship on the matter, as well as the difficulties in accessing information that would allow scholars to unravel in a more profound way both gender itself and other characteristics that generate inequality, this work needs to simplify the analysis by referring to the gender perspective in binary terms. It analyzes the political representation of

women—as opposed to that exercised by men—and does so without pretending to ignore or make invisible the diversity of the meanings of the feminine and gender.

Mexico is an excellent laboratory for evaluating the formal dimension of representation, as it has approved gender quotas and parity. It also allows deepening the knowledge of political representation in a multidimensional way (formal, descriptive, substantive, and symbolic) at the subnational level. Three reasons justify this idea. First, given the process of institutional change that has taken place in recent decades and produced the most robust federal gender electoral regime in the region (Freidenberg 2020), it is urgent to evaluate the measures taken, their scope, and areas of opportunity to continue advancing in the construction of parity democracies. Second, given the federal nature of the political system with 32 states (each with its own rules of the electoral game) and recent centralization of electoral governance, looking at the states allows for a complete evaluation of how women access and exercise power. Third, given that there is a lot of information available on the legislatures that have emerged in each state after the adoption of the gender parity principle in 2014, it is not only possible but also convenient to evaluate how this principle has impacted women's access to power and the exercise of power in subnational legislatures.

Certainly, the transformations that took place in the country since the approval of parity at the constitutional level, the push for the nationalization of the electoral organization system (2014), and the acceptance of various complementary measures to the gender electoral regime of the federal entities (2015, 2017, and 2019) implied significant changes in the access of women's representation in the states (Freidenberg and Garrido de Sierra 2021; Freidenberg and Gilas 2020; Gilas 2018; Vidal Correa 2016). The extensive theoretical and empirical question arising from these developments is to understand whether the increase in the number of women legislators in state congresses (descriptive representation of women) has resulted in increased attention to women's political concerns (substantive representation of women) and whether it entails better conditions for women to exercise power in institutions on equal terms with men (a symbolic representation of women). The theoretical premise usually states that more women in public office will result in a different way of doing politics and the materialization of greater equality in all spheres of society (Schwindt-Bayer 2018; Franceschet 2008; Dahlerup 1988). However, in practice, there is a significant gap in comparative empirical research at the subnational level that allows empirical corroboration of whether women legislators have succeeded in feminizing politics and transforming gender inequalities.

1.1   Research

This research aims to fill a gap in the comparative subnational scholarship by developing a multidimensional assessment of women's political representation in a federal political system such as Mexico. This country allows for a comparative evaluation of the changes made in the 32 states, their interactions, and their results

over time. The Mexican experience in terms of women's political representation at the federal level has been very successful, as reforms created a more robust federal "gender electoral regime" and critical actors capable of monitoring the implementation of those rules, facilitating an increase in the number of elected women legislators (Freidenberg 2020). Still, little is known at the subnational level about the impact of the increase in women legislators on other dimensions of political representation, such as symbolic or substantive representation.

While analyses have been developed at the national and subnational level, they have focused on formal representation (Hevia-Rocha 2020; Freidenberg and Alva Huitrón 2017; Vidal Correa 2014; Alanis Figueroa 2014; Peña Molina 2009; Aparicio Castillo 2011; Reynoso and D'Angelo 2006; among others); legislative descriptive representation (Freidenberg and Garrido de Sierra 2021; Hevia-Rocha 2020; Flores-Ivich and Freidenberg 2017; Vidal Correa 2016; Caminotti and Freidenberg 2016; Zetterberg 2007; Stevenson 1999; among others); and on the relationship between descriptive and substantive representation (González Schont 2016; García Méndez 2019; Hernández García and Rodríguez Alonso 2019; Cerna Villagra 2019; Pacheco Ladrón de Guevara 2007; among others). Although these efforts have yielded exciting conclusions based on empirical evidence and strengthened a theory focused on the analysis of presence, it is still insufficient to explain the other dimensions of representation and the relation between them. Therefore, the idea is to contribute to comparative knowledge from the subnational level and to understand the relationship between the formal and descriptive representation of women, the content of legislative work in terms of preferences and interests, and its symbolic effects for women and politics in general.

This research, therefore, seeks to fill a theoretical and empirical gap regarding the effects of gender parity on the programmatic and symbolic construction of power. More specifically, it aims to broaden the analysis of women's political representation through its dimensions (formal, descriptive, substantive, and symbolic) in the Mexican subnational Congresses and explore the political–institutional, socioeconomic, attitudinal, and representational factors that explain political representation. While having women legislators is a crucial starting point for exercising the political–electoral rights of this social group, it is also essential to observe *what they do* and *how they do it* when they are in elected office. The subnational arena has been understudied in comparative politics due to the difficulty of looking at the local level (usually with a particular national bias in methodological approaches) and the problems of accessing data that would allow for the analysis of a large number of observations in a significant number of subnational entities. Mexican women have faced adverse conditions to exercise their citizenship depending on the state they reside in. This is not a minor issue, as these inequalities affect the democratization of the political system as a whole. The fact that the distribution of public goods and access to political rights are not homogeneous for men and women—as would be expected since the inclusion of the principle of gender parity or affirmative action measures—and that these differences are accentuated at the state or local level, hinders the efforts of the construction of democracy with substantive equality.

This research aims to advance the knowledge of the extent of formal equality and substantive equality in the territory, showing that the internal democratization of a federal country is not necessarily homogeneous in all subnational units (O'Donnell 1999; Giraudy et al. 2019). It means that parity in law does not guarantee the exercise of power on equal terms. The construction of democracies that respect substantive equality implies abandoning the idea that it is enough to recognize rights in law (formal equality). At the same time, it is urgent to generate other strategies and initiatives to achieve equality in outcomes (Saba 2016).

If there are differences in the exercise of rights, formal equality does not translate into substantive equality (Bareiro and Soto 2015). If these differences are state based, this implies obstacles of different nature and intensity in the exercise of citizenship in the territory. The dynamics of interaction can also be subnational and multilevel. It may be that some state entities, at a given moment, seek the extension of political-electoral rights in a much deeper and more agile manner than other states (and even before the federal level) and, at the same time, there may be states that are much more reluctant than others to approve rights due to the autonomy of local leaders and elites vis-à-vis the national government. At a certain point, the expansion of rights may also come from the nationalizing influence of national elites through the demand for harmonization of legislation at the state level (as has happened in Mexico since 2014). It may even be that the democratizing demands have a contagion effect between state entities, pressuring political elites, state women's networks, or women politicians so that states join the expansion of women's political–electoral rights or other types of rights.

This research seeks to overcome the political and intellectual blindness implied in ignoring the difficulties women face while exercising their rights that affect the emergence of a systematic and comparative understanding of state and local levels. In practice, when women have gained access to positions (legislative and executive), the focus has been on the national level. This has meant ignoring how informal politics, subnational spaces, pressures, simulations or practices, decisions, and ways of doing politics that limit women's opportunities to exercise their rights are reproduced. If this is the case, understanding how the gender gap manifests itself and the factors that can reduce or eliminate it is a crucial step towards the subnational democratization of any political system.

1.2   Plan of the Book

The book begins with a theoretical and conceptual discussion of political representation and its essential role in the operation of democracies. Chapter 2, *Women may have the seats, but not the power: the argument* sets out how women's political representation, its dimensions, and relationships are studied. It presents the theoretical, conceptual, and methodological toolbox that structures the research and aims at filling the gap in contemporary comparative empirical research on whether more

women legislators in Mexican state congresses succeed in feminizing politics and transforming gender inequalities.

Chapter 3, *The Long and Winding Road to Gender Parity in Mexican Congresses*, describes and analyzes the formal dimension of political representation, in its authorization aspect, concerning the legal changes that have been promoted to achieve a more significant insertion of women in the spaces of political representation at the federal and subnational levels. It evaluates the design of the gender electoral regime for nominating candidacies based on the "Gender Electoral Regime Strength Index" (Freidenberg 2020; Caminotti and Freidenberg 2016; Peña Molina 2009, 2014). An original dataset that captures changes to the gender electoral regime at the subnational level (#MujeresEnLasNormas) (Freidenberg and Alva Huitrón 2017, updated) allows us to assess this institutional framework's strength over the 30-year period and for 32 Mexican states. The chapter describes the decisions that created the regulatory framework of the gender electoral regime over three decades and focuses on gender parity rules and the nationalization of the electoral system that took place in the country after the constitutional reform of 2014.

Chapter 4, *Why Do Some States' Congresses Have More Female Representatives than Others?* explores the factors that explain women's descriptive representation levels in the last 30 years, although focusing on the two most recent subnational legislatures of 32 Mexican congresses. This chapter analyzes the relationship between the formal dimension (authorization aspect) and women's descriptive representation. From the construction of an original database on the presence of women in state Congresses from 1987 to 2019 (#MujeresElectas), it evaluates the weight of political–institutional variables (such as the strength of the gender electoral regime) as well as that of socioeconomic variables (level of economic development, modernization, and educational level), controlled by the trajectory of the gender electoral regime and political alternation. The evidence presented in this chapter is consistent with the hypothesis that the political–institutional variables, particularly those that establish how candidacies are registered, have the most significant impact on the levels of women's descriptive representation at the subnational level. It also identifies a series of institutional, partisan, and attitudinal obstacles women face to access representative positions.

Chapter 5, *How Do Women Exercise the Legislative Function?* addresses the analysis of symbolic representation, focusing on how women act within legislative bodies and exploring the weight of different variables on symbolic representation at the subnational level. The chapter asks whether more women in seats means more women with power in decision-making bodies and whether they change how decisions are made and what the legislative agenda is pushed forward. Using an original methodology, it evaluates the symbolic dimension of representation. Based on the analysis of the institutional and critical legislative context, it estimates the women's access to leadership positions (executive positions and commissions), the incorporation of gender mainstreaming in the internal rules of Congresses (such as the existence of a Gender Unit or a Gender Studies Centre or the use of inclusive language), and the presence of obstacles to the exercise of power by women. The original dataset (#MujeresLegisladoras) systematizes information on the integration and

internal functioning of the 32 State Congresses in the last two legislative periods, evidencing that higher descriptive representation improves the chances of having more women leading and actively participating in legislative deliberation processes. In this sense, the research shows the relationship between the descriptive and symbolic dimensions of representation. The data evidence that the glass ceilings have been breaking down, given that the increase in the number of women has accelerated their access to the presidencies, executive bodies, and committee presidencies (both hard and soft). However, they also highlight that internal resistance, which shows that the institutions continue to be gendered.

Chapter 6, *How and Whom do Women Represent in Legislatures?* assesses the relationship between substantive, descriptive, and symbolic representation in the Mexican states' congresses from 2014 to 2021. Once women gain access to office, political representation aims to ensure that public decisions reflect, to some extent, the interests of the represented group. The research explores what it would take for that representation to be effective. Based on an original database of 24,397 legislative proposals presented in 46 subnational legislatures (two for each of the 23 states), it evaluates how many generalist initiatives are presented; how many of them can be classified as feminist, which actors present them (men, women, mixed group) and with what legislative success. The findings are exciting and show that there is a positive and statistically positive relationship between descriptive and substantive representation in all the operationalizations of substantive representation analyzed. The results also reveal that the relationship between symbolic representation and substantive representation is less clear, and, in some ways, challenges how various theoretical investigations link the two dimensions.

Finally, Chap. 7, *Conclusions,* identifies good practices that allow for the advancement of gender parity and the design of public policies to strengthen parity democracy. The study offers a series of findings and contributions to comparative research based on the Mexican subnational experience. The findings of this research are novel and innovative because they contribute to the comparative knowledge on the empirical relationships between the dimensions of women's political representation at the subnational level. It is an aspect of research that had hardly been explored in Mexico due to the difficulties of having comparative databases for a large number of observations, in all (or most) of the states over an extended period. The main finding of this research is that the political–institutional reforms carried out to demand more women in partisan candidacies have been successful in increasing the number of female legislators in Mexican states' congresses. This peaceful and democratizing revolution of presence has also led to more women in legislative leadership positions: chairmanships of the Congresses and the Committees and participate in those Committees where they have historically been relegated. Although these transformations are important in the construction of more egalitarian democracies, they are still insufficient.

The research shows that the presence of more women legislators has not eliminated political, attitudinal, or partisan obstacles. Their presence does not translate into progressive or feminist legislative agendas, nor has it led to a greater feminization of politics. The institutional and noninstitutional efforts in the Mexican states

were aimed at having more women in seats under the implicit assumption that they would promote the necessary transformations to eliminate the obstacles women face. However, in practice, the barriers persist.

Even though the presence of more women is valuable in itself, in recent years, expectations have been raised about how these women should exercise power and leadership positions. Moreover, some thought that women should be the ones to promote a certain type of public policies that represent "women's interests" and that they should be feminist in nature to eliminate the structural barriers existing in the states. This deterministic assumption of women's gender in their legislative work supposes that all women are gender-conscious, that they must be spokespersons for certain identities, defend the same interests and promote the same agendas. It means assuming that there is a common identity just because they are or feel female. These assumptions ignore the diversity of ideas, interests, and demands existing among women. This research rejects such essentialist expectations and advocates for revising those assumptions that place extra demand on women and limit the view on the exercise of political representation.

This research presents sufficient empirical evidence that contradicts those expectations. Thus, it challenges the fact that women's representation should be evaluated by different criteria or standards than men's. Women are not obliged to promote any agenda they do not consider or want to embrace, even if it is desirable for them to push policy proposals that address existing gender inequalities. This research considers that women legislators are not necessarily the ones who should "promote and lead" certain agendas to tackle the structural inequalities faced by the country. Their numbers in state congresses have not yet managed to overcome the dynamics of what is considered a "critical mass" (Dahlerup 1988), nor have they managed to impose themselves and change partisan agendas. Although having more women in congresses is fundamental for building parity democracies, it is not always sufficient to guarantee the representation of women who seek to defend women's emancipatory (progressive) interests and causes. The parties—whatever their ideologies—control feminist demands and agendas. It seems that the "representative or partisan mandate" dominates over other types of mandates (such as the imperative or the free). These findings, therefore, question the classical view of representation as an imperative mandate, particularly when assessing the connection between female legislators with programmatic agendas and the female voters.

Therefore, this research adopts the relational approach (Heywood 2004; Cotta and Best 2007; Young 2000), going beyond the classical vision and recognizing the dynamism of the representative processes and the creativity of the representatives. However, it also considers that the latter develops in a context of formal and informal rules that restrict the activity of the representatives or allow the change of the existing inequalities in the exercise of representation. Understanding representation as a process assumes that representatives are not only passive recipients of signals from the citizenry regarding what they expect them to represent but also actors who create citizenship during the process of representation.

Women (and men or others) are free to represent plural demands, interests, and agendas and not limit themselves to one type of interest just because they are

women. A person who belongs to an identity group may not necessarily represent the interests of this group. Some even argue that the inverse position could occur: there are no people from a specific group, while others promote their interests. Therefore, it is crucial to think about representation integrally and not only from a single dimension or exclusively from the principal-agent perspective (Pitkin 1967; Celis et al. 2008).

These results call for a review of the assumptions and ideas (and certainties) that have accompanied the parity revolution in the Mexican states and determine how women's political representation is exercised. The progress made in recent decades invites us to rethink representation and, with it, the narratives and expectations regarding what women legislators are supposed to do, how to promote plural and multi-spatial agendas across party lines, and how to involve different social, political, and economic actors in processes of eradication of the inequalities. These are not agendas of interest to women only—much less only to feminists—but should guide the work of all legislators committed to democracy and substantive equality.

Based on all these ideas, this research has explored the challenges of accessing and exercising women's political representation in the Mexican states. The lessons and challenges are discussed within a broader body of comparative research, providing knowledge to academia, policymakers, and international cooperation agencies on the challenges that remain to strengthen Latin American democracies and on the need to continue exploring the links between subnational politics and the democratization of federal political systems.

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Chapter 2
They Have the Seats, But Not the Power: The Argument

2.1 Political Representation: A Multifaceted Conundrum

Elections are the heart of representative democracy (Schattschneider 1942), specifically when they comply with specific preestablished procedures, respect certain guarantees and rights, and generate uncertain results. Elections are a democratic mechanism that allows people to select who will legitimately exercise power and which, for this reason, prevents violence and regulates social conflict (Dahl 1971; Manin et al. 1999). Elections do not always meet all the characteristics required to qualify them as genuinely free, fair, and competitive. However, for the moment, they are, as Przeworski (2019, 21) argues, the only instrument that allows choosing rulers democratically (or at least there is no known and better option).[1] It is the advantage that democracy has over authoritarian and totalitarian regimes, charismatic leaders, or electoral authoritarianism: that in this scheme, through competitive procedures, the citizenry can select, control, and remove those who govern the community (Przeworski 2019, 20).[2]

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[1] Elections are *free* when there are no regulatory restrictions on competing, when there is freedom for candidates and their supporters to mobilize for votes, and when voters experience little or no coercion in the exercise of their vote. This means that there is a high degree of freedom of expression, movement, and association in political life. Elections are *fair* when the authority is neutral, competent, and effective against fraud and in counting votes; when the police, military and courts treat candidates impartially; when competitors have equal access to public means and resources; when electoral districts and regulations do not systematically disadvantage the opposition; when all adults can vote; and when there is a clear and impartial procedure for resolving complaints and disputes (Diamond 2004).

[2] While elections are a necessary condition for calling a political system democratic, they are not a sufficient condition (Diamond 2004; Schedler 2002). In this sense, there may be situations where elections are held but they present irregularities, malpractices and/or electoral governance problems (Norris et al. 2014). Even when a democracy requires elections, it does not accept just any kind of elections (Schedler 2002). Moreover, there can even be elections without democracy