



Política

ISSN: 0716-1077

revistapolitica@iap.uchile.cl

Universidad de Chile

Chile

Vidal Correa, Fernanda

Who represents women in Mexico? Critical actors in times of congressional gender parity

Política, vol. 60, núm. 1, 2022, pp. 35-55

Universidad de Chile

Santiago, Chile

Available in: <https://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=64579192002>

- How to cite
- Complete issue
- More information about this article
- Journal's homepage in redalyc.org

redalyc.org

Scientific Information System

Network of Scientific Journals from Latin America, the Caribbean, Spain and Portugal

Non-profit academic project, developed under the open access initiative

WHO REPRESENTS WOMEN IN MEXICO? CRITICAL ACTORS IN TIMES OF CONGRESSIONAL GENDER PARITY

Fernanda Vidal Correa

mvidal@up.edu.mx

Universidad Panamericana, México

There is no sufficient evidence regarding the relationship between descriptive and women's substantive representation in the Mexican Congress. This research asks, what characteristics do lawmakers who promote the rights and interests of women share? Critical actors theory calls for research to emphasize agents over numbers. Thus, information about the identity of sponsoring deputies was studied for the LXIII and LXIV Congresses. Results show that individual actors, mostly female legislators, promote women's representation. Some have seniority, but most have no experience as elected officials, nor as part of the Congressional leadership. This suggests that actors who have the political will to promote women's issues have the least power to do so, which, in turn, undermines the power of a critical mass.

Keywords: *Congress, seniority, critical actors, descriptive representation, Mexico*

¿QUIÉN REPRESENTA A LAS MUJERES EN MÉXICO? ACTORES CRÍTICOS EN TIEMPOS DE PARIDAD DE GÉNERO EN EL CONGRESO

La evidencia sobre la relación entre la representación descriptiva y sustantiva de las mujeres en el Congreso mexicano es limitada. ¿Qué características comparten los legisladores que promueven los derechos e intereses de las mujeres? La teoría de actores críticos exige enfocarse en el perfil de quienes son los representantes. A través del estudio de factores de identidad de quienes integraron la LXIII y LXIV Legislaturas, se demuestra que actores individuales, en su mayoría mujeres, son quienes promueven la representación de las mujeres. La mayoría no tiene experiencia legislativa ni forman parte de las elites del Congreso. Esto sugiere que quienes tienen voluntad política para representar a las mujeres tienen menos poder para hacerlo, lo que socava el poder de una masa crítica.

Palabras clave: *Congreso, experiencia, actores críticos, representación sustantiva, México*

Acting for women: From a critical mass to critical actors

One of the crucial questions in women's representation literature is if women represent women. This is especially important in modern democracies where the number of women elected is increasing daily. The idea that a certain number of women elected is a plausible trigger for women's substantive representation has been increasingly rejected. Literature now suggests that researchers should analyse the roles of certain actors and positions of representation (Celis & Childs, 2008; Chaney, 2012; Childs & Krook, 2008, 2009; Severs et al., 2016). Critical actors theory calls attention to the need for research to emphasize agents over outcomes and focus on those actors with enough leadership to initiate policy proposals and deliver positive outcomes. This research seeks to join this approach, considering whether certain legislators with specific profiles are pushing a gendered agenda in Mexico and whether they can be described as critical actors who represent women.

This research incorporated all bills drafted and submitted between September 2015 and April 2020 in two specific Congresses: LXIII and LXIV (this last one will still have one more year of sessions). Bills on women's issues were identified first in order to pinpoint actors who have initiated legislation on women's interests. From these, it was possible to detect who had advanced the legislation and identify characteristics and identities.

This research seeks to build from the literature on women's representation in several ways. First, it studies a period in which the descriptive and symbolic representation clearly gained significant ground but questions whether women were better represented. Second, this work examines the profiles of the actors who pushed the legislative gendered agenda rather than the aggregated number of lawmakers elected. Finally, unlike other studies of women in Mexico that examine the numerical composition of Congress or that examine results as roll-call voting for women's bills (Cervantes et al., 2019; García Méndez, 2019; Kerevel, 2010; Piscopo, 2011), this paper emphasizes the possible significance of specific actors endorsing and promoting women's issues through legislation. This is important because without leadership and legislative expertise, by the time bills reach the plenary for debate, decisions may already have been made and the bills may be set up to fail.

For the successful creation of public policy, both institutional actions (e.g., hearings, debates, and votes) and external conditions (e.g., lobbying and support of public opinion) are required. However, the identities and political characteristics of those who sponsored these bills are also of great relevance, as "political scientists have demonstrated the importance of lawmakers' identities, showing that race, gender, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation affect legislative and representational behaviour" (Curry & Haydon, 2018). This is the particular focus of this work.

This research explores existing studies about representation to establish the necessary research framework on which further conclusions are based. Next, the

methodological process is described. This is followed by a brief but necessary description of the situation of women in Mexico and some aspects of the legislative process. Then, the paper breaks down the analysis into three elements: gender, party affiliation and institutional status. The latter includes length of congressional service and leadership positions. The article ends with a general conclusion that discusses the findings, their relevance for the study of representation, the role of representation in advancing women's rights in Mexico, and whether women are transforming Congress.

About representation

One of the main issues at the heart of the theoretical-conceptual debate regarding representation is the possible connection between the two originally identified (Pitkin, 1967) dimensions of political representation—descriptive and substantive. The first refers to the degree to which there are shared signs of identity between representatives and the represented, while the second has to do with the congruence between their actions, interests, and opinions. The concept of critical mass (Dahlerup, 1988) aimed to provide a potential link between these two dimensions. Although Dahlerup's hypothesis did not provide a direct linear causal relationship, it was used in this way.

Prior studies (Dahlerup, 1988, 2006; Htun & Jones, 2002; Pippa Norris & Lovenduski, 2009) were based on the assumption that, in politics, women in government represent women and have different impacts on the agenda compared to their male peers. Later empirical studies on the diverse dimensions of representation concluded that any relation was probabilistic but not deterministic (D. L. Dodson, 2006). As Mackay (2008, 125) states, “the presence of women in the legislatures – in whatever proportion – does not translate simply or automatically into substantive actions in favour of women and their possible interests”.

Research has now shifted, at least partially, and calls for a new set of questions that could potentially explain any possible relationships between substantive and descriptive representation (Childs & Krook, 2008, 2009). In fact, the analytical lens is moving from macro to micro studies (Barnes, 2016). These new reformulations look to the actors who represent women and how the substantive representation of women takes place (Heath et al., 2005). This analytical approach focuses on the identities and characteristics of key figures responsible for pushing a gender agenda. According to Macaulay (2005, 5), “these critical actors have resources that enable them to influence the process of building alliances that result in gender policie”. Resources are linked to the representatives' political trajectories, ideologies, partisan affiliation and any possible links to the women's movement. Identifying these critical actors and what are they doing to represent women is the objective of this research.

Women in Mexico: A path toward substantive representation

In Mexico, gender quotas have been controversial since the beginning of lobbying in Congress, both at the national and sub-national legislatures. The first time gender quotas were approved with some sanctions for non-compliance was June 2002. New legislation established a mandatory system of gender quotas that required all political parties to respect a 70/30 ratio of candidates of both sexes in federal elections. In 2008, the magnitude of the quota was modified to 60/40 for majority-elected candidates. By 2012, at the federal level, the electoral law had established a new rule. Of the total number of nominations, including both deputies and senators, at least 40% had to be of a different gender, including proportionally elected and majority elected nominees. Quotas had a significant effect on the descriptive representation of women, and the election of female legislators increased little by little from 24% in 2003 up to 35.9% before parity (2012).

In December 2013, Congress changed the Constitution, establishing that parity would apply to candidates nominated for national and state congresses and municipal positions. These obligations were to be applicable to political parties, coalitions, and independent candidates. Consequences of this new regulatory framework were observed in 2015. In all, women occupied 42.4% of the seats in the LXIII Congress. These results show a 15% increase compared to the 2012 elections (Favela, 2015). In the 2018 general election, more than 9,300 candidates were registered for municipal presidencies alone, and of these, 47% were women. Women were elected to 440 municipal presidencies or 27% of the 1,613 municipalities that were up for election. In 2018, 49% of elected local legislators were women (546 of 1113). For the first time, the federal Congress was composed of practically the same number of men and women. In the Chamber of Deputies, 241 of 500 seats were occupied by women (48%), while in the Senate, there were 63 of the 128 seats (49%). Numerical outcomes have been praised internationally, but gender parity in the composition of the country's legislative institutions does not necessarily translate into more women in positions to better represent women's interests.

Securing better representation means that actors who push the agenda have the necessary resources that enable them to influence the process. Actors' political trajectories, ideologies, partisan affiliation, committee membership and congressional seniority may play a more important role than the representative's gender itself. The following sections attempt to provide insight into the shared characteristics of actors who advance women's interests in the Chamber of Deputies. The intention is to uncover what characteristics lawmakers share and to identify whether critical actors are pushing the gender agenda.

Methodology

To identifying legislators who advance legislation on women's interests and to provide in-depth characterizations, bills on women's issues were identified first. Women's issues are here understood as "those issues where policy consequences are likely to have a more immediate and direct impact on significantly larger numbers of women than men" (Carroll 1994, 15). Additionally, bills in which women are the envisioned beneficiaries and those that have the intention of greater equality and opportunities for women were also considered. Bills targeting issues in which women traditionally are thought to have interests but that were clearly intended for other groups, such as children or the elderly, were not included. However, as women perform certain roles, such as mothers or caregivers, all policies aiming to provide greater opportunities and equality for women, such as maternity leave or improving childcare services, are included in this study. These bills constitute critical acts that lawmakers who claim to represent women perform. By identifying these, it was possible to pinpoint who the lawmakers were and, later on, identify the characteristics they share.

Legislature selection and time frame

Coding was performed for the following periods:

- a. LXIII Congress: September 2015 to April 2018.
- b. LXIV Congress: September 2018 to April 2021.

The LXIII and LXIV Congresses were selected as these two were elected using the same parity rules; political parties are mandated to nominate women in 50% of all positions available, including both majority and proportional systems. The total number of bills introduced during the period of analysis were coded, 9,727. Subsequently, those related to women's issues were identified and work with, 999.

Content coding

Two research assistants were responsible for coding the 9,727 bills under the supervision of a senior researcher. Before performing the work, the raters went through three training sessions, through which they became familiar with the units and categories of analysis. Subsequently, in order to measure inter-rater reliability, both raters independently analysed a random sample of 367 bills. The differences generated from the sampling process were discussed and resolved in a fourth session with each rater. Afterward, each rater continued to process all bills. Krippendorff's α was used to calculate reliability (see variable descriptions below).

In order to identify the sponsoring agents responsible for advancing the gender agenda, all 9,727 bills were first coded either as women's issues or other legislative issues, with an α coefficient equal to .88 (D. Dodson & Carroll, 1991; Heath et al., 2005; Reingold, 2000; Schwindt-Bayer, 2006; Swers, 2002). This was done based on the following descriptions.

- a. Women's issues: these bills addressed concerns such as reproductive rights, violence against women and sexual harassment, gender equality legislation (e.g., quotas and parity), civil rights for women, equal pay for equal work, care conditions, education programs targeting women, and economic policies addressing women's issues. All bills that crossed into other thematic categories but targeted women directly were coded as women's issues. Examples include bills on women's health, educational programs, pink tax, and care facilities for working parents, as well as those that extended parental rights to all genders, such as fathers' access to public day-care and paternity leave.
- b. Other legislative issues: these bills addressed children and family issues, such as divorce and other family contract matters, children's welfare, child sex crimes, and child work. They also included bills on education, health, and the economy; in these cases, all except for those explicitly designed for women or women's issues were included. This category also included bills on agriculture (e.g., soil cultivation for the growing of crops and the rearing of animals to provide food, wool, and other products). Bills on employment, such as wages, gratuities, benefits, worker's rights, and any form of working contract relations, were included when they did not target women explicitly. Fiscal affairs and government affairs were also included.

Bills were categorized following a three-stage process. First, the raters grouped bills according to the commission to which these were initially sent. This allowed them to easily identify some of the bills as they were allocated to the *Comisión de Equidad y Género/ Comisión de Igualdad de Género* (Gender Commission). 472 bills were either sent directly to the Gender Commission, or that requested its technical advice.

Due to the process of bills' allocation, coding using only the information on the commission bills were sent to would potentially leave out many bills. For example, in the LXIII Legislature, only 124 of the 370 bills coded as women's issues were allocated specifically to the *Comisión de Igualdad de Género*. Therefore, in a second coding process, the raters checked the descriptions provided for each bill in the Legislative Information System digital platform (*Gaceta Parlamentaria*). These brief descriptions allowed them to identify most of the bills that addressed women's issues, of which there were 999 in total.

Finally, to make sure no bills on women's issues would be left within the other category, the *Gaceta Parlamentaria* was used to check for any inconsistencies. This database allows users to search all bills by words contained in their titles or contents.

A list of words was given to the coders, which they used to check whether the bills with those words were already coded in the women's issues category.

Once bills were identified, bills on women's issues were divided into individual bills and group bills. The former, 840 bills, were sponsored by a single deputy. The latter, 159 bills, were sponsored either by groups of deputies, or other group actors (the Senate, local congresses and parliamentary groups). Since the intention of this research was to identify key identity characteristics of legislators advancing women's issues, coding and the following analysis was focused only on individual sponsorships. Bills introduced by individual legislators, 840, were coded to identify certain characteristics including the sex of the sponsor, party affiliation, the length of congressional service, and if the tenure had any leadership positions.

Variables

Sex and Party Affiliation

For coding these two variables, raters were given access to the photographic album of the Chamber of Deputies for both Congresses. Thus, names and photos were compared to identify the sex of the sponsoring agent ($\alpha = .96$). These same albums included information regarding party affiliation ($\alpha = .96$).

Length of congressional service and Leadership positions

The length of congressional service, as in the number of years a member has served in elected office ($\alpha = .96$), as well as the possible leading positions ($\alpha = .98$) were coded based on reports on each elected officer provided by the Legislative Information System of the Ministry of the Interior, known as *Secretaría de Gobernación*. This system provides information on all lawmakers who have ever been elected to either the Chamber of Deputies or the Senate. The information includes previous experience and previous election mandates. Deputies' leadership positions include commission chairs, members of the Board of Directors, members of the Political Coordination Board, and members of the Dean's Board.

Bills on women's issues: Who acts and what characteristics do legislators share?

As detailed above, the presence of female deputies does not automatically give the legislative agenda a broader, more authentic, and truly representative perspective on women's interests and rights. In fact, critical actors working for women could result in better outcomes, legislatively speaking, than a larger number of female legislators. The following sections examine these characteristics in detail. The objective is to

describe and pinpoint any common features and significant aspects of those who can be identified as key actors.

Gender

The number of elected female legislators in Congress is the highest in Mexico's history. The data on the two Congresses studied shows that work on women's issues is mostly conducted by female legislators. Out of the 840 bills studied, 673 were sponsored by female legislators, while only 167 were sponsored by men. Female deputies who presented at least one bill on women's issues double the number of male legislators sponsoring bills on women's issues. In the LXIII Congress, 214 women were elected, and 104 of these legislators initiated at least one bill on women's issues (48.6%). Men accounted for 286 seats, and only 48 sponsored at least one piece of legislation on women's issues (19.5%). In the LXIV Congress, 136 female legislators, of the 241 elected, sponsored at least one bill on women's issues (56.4%). In this same Congress, 52 male legislators, of 259, initiated at least one bill on women's issues (20%).

These results create some new questions. For example, are all deputies equally active, as in number of bills sponsored? Are deputies, regardless of their party membership, sponsoring bills on women's issues? Can deputies in one party be singled out? Is the legislative agenda on women's issues driven by a majority/minority political cleavage? Further analysis attempts to address these questions.

Party affiliation

Party ideology and membership have been identified as factors that explain the variance in both the share of women members in office and the degree of support given to adopting women's interests as part of the legislative agenda (Kittilson, 1999, 2001; Murray, 2013; O'Neill & Stewart, 2009; Rule, 1987; Studlar & Matland, 1994). Political parties and ideologies can play a role in advancing or regressing women's rights and interests, shaping the contents of legislation.

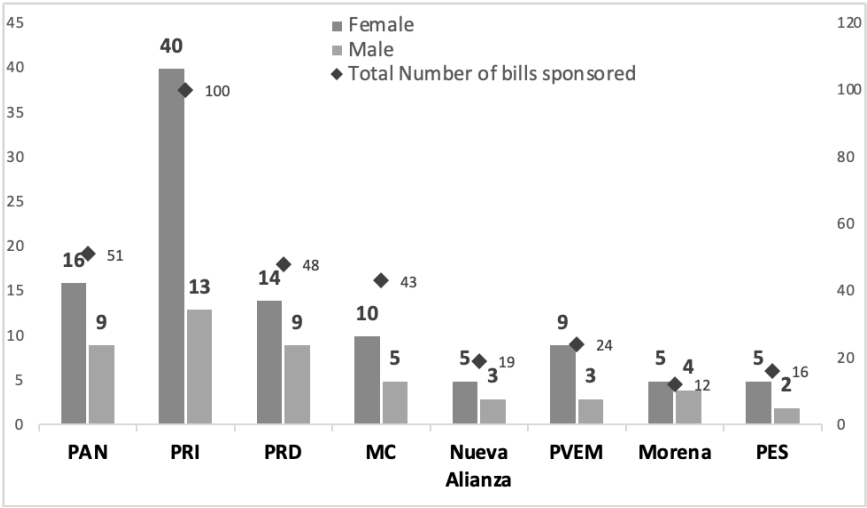
Some scholars have suggested that left-wing parties support women's issues as they are linked to egalitarian ideologies and to the women's movement (Beer, 2017; Duverger, 1955; Erzeel & Celis, 2016). However, current social and political dynamics do not allow right-wing parties to exclude women, at least not so publicly. Kittilson explained that "left parties may no longer be the only parties to support women because support for women spreads across the ideological spectrum" (1999, 82). Thus, addressing the issue of party affiliation may shed some light on the representation of women's interests and how female and male deputies reconcile their beliefs, loyalty to their party, and ideologies to advance a gender agenda.

In terms of the affiliations of male and female deputies in the LXIII and LXIV Congresses, legislators who have initiated at least one piece of legislation on women’s issues come from a wide range of political parties, both left-wing and right-wing. However, in the LXIII Congress, one political party had more female deputies initiating bills on women’s issues than any other. In the PRI, which had hegemonic control of Mexican party politics until 1997, 40 female deputies sponsored bills on women’s issues (see Figure 1). In the LXIII Congress, the PRI held the majority in the Chamber of Deputies, with 40.4% of the seats.

The second-largest party, which held 21.4% of the seats, was the PAN. This party had 16 female deputies initiating bills on women’s issues. The differences between the two parties are significant. The PRI not only had more active female legislators but also initiated the highest number of bills on women’s issues in the LXIII Congress. Deputies in the PRI initiated 100 pieces of legislation on women’s issues (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Deputies with at least one bill on women’s issues, by political party and sex, LXIII



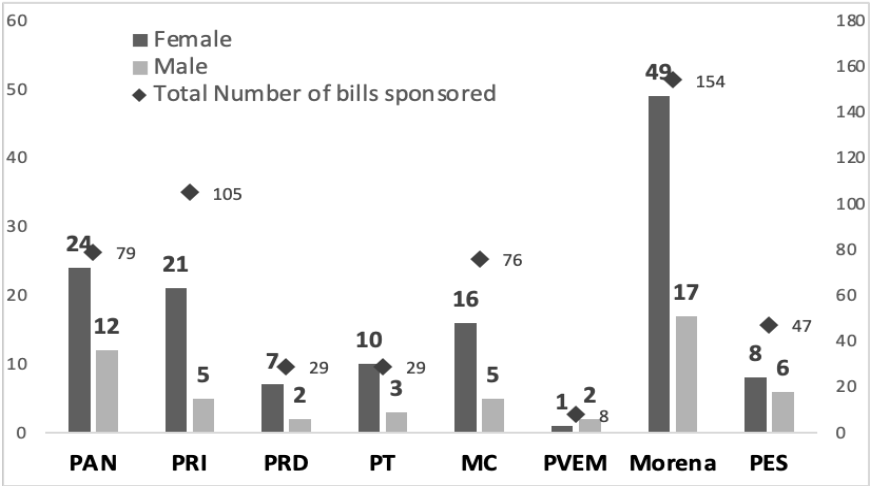
Source: Own calculation based on information from the *Gaceta Parlamentaria*.

Despite the PRI’s majoritarian control over the Chamber, opposition parties in the LXIII Congress, including the PRD, MC, MORENA, and PES, together initiated more than 100 pieces of legislation on women’s issues. They had 34 female deputies conducting this work (see Figure 1). This suggests that not all female and male deputies were equally active and some deputies were responsible for more than one bill.

In the LXIV Congress, PAN and MORENA have the highest number of female and male deputies sponsoring at least one piece of legislation on women’s issues (see Figure 2). The two political parties represent opposite sides of the political spectrum, as PAN has been long identified as a right-wing conservative party and the recently created MORENA (2014) is identified as a leftist party.

Figure 2

Deputies with at least one bill on women’s issues, by political party and sex, LXIV



Source: Own calculation based on information from the *Gaceta Parlamentaria*.

Despite the implications of the above figures (Figures 1 and 2), it is important to take into consideration additional information to further support conclusions about party affiliation and women’s substantive representation.

In both the LXIII and LXIV Congresses, minority parties have fewer female deputies sponsoring women’s issues. However, when the total number of female deputies in each party is identified, it can be argue that in proportion to the total numbers, most female deputies in minority parties have initiated bills on women’s issues, while only some female deputies in majority parties are engaged in women’s issues. In both Congresses, a good example of a minority party in which all female deputies initiated bills on women’s issues is the MC Party. This same behaviour is exhibited by most female deputies in other minority parties, such as Nueva Alianza, PRD and PES. In the LXIV Congress, PAN, PRI, PRD, MC and PES are minority parties, as in the share of seats they hold, but most female deputies in their ranks have initiated at least one bill on women’s issues. All women deputies in majority parties are not as engaged as women deputies in minority parties, but still an important number are active (see Table 1).

The above evidences suggest first that minority parties, even with a lesser number of representatives, have an special interest in women’s rights. Women deputies in minority parties have taken on women’s issues as a clear subject within their agendas. Second, even if one party has numerically more female deputies promoting bills on women’s issues than other parties, this does not imply that the party and the vast majority of its female representatives are involved in promoting the gender agenda. Rather, majority parties have small groups that have appropriated this agenda (see Table 1).

Table 1
Percentage of male/female deputies with at least one bill on women’s issues from the total number of female/male deputies by party

	LXIII Congress			LXIV Congress		
Party★	Female %	Male %	Seats %	Female %	Male %	Seats %
PAN	34.8	14.8	21.4	70.6	26.7	15.6
PRI	46	11.3	40.4	100	18	9.2
PRD	77.8	27.3	10.2	88	50	2.2
MC	100	45.5	4.2	100	50	5.4
Nueva Alianza	71.4	50	2.6	-	-	-
PVEM	56.3	13.6	7.6	25	28.6	2.6
Morena	20.8	15.4	10	38	13.8	50.4
PES	100	33.3	2.2	72.7	50	5.2
PT	-	-	-	56	11.5	8.4

★PT did not get any seats in the LXIII Congress; Nueva Alianza did not get any seats in the LXIV Congress.

Source: *Own calculation based on information from the Gaceta Parlamentaria.*

In contrast to female deputies, male deputies are seldom interested in sponsoring legislation on women’s issues. Although there are some exceptions, such as in the case of MC or Nueva Alianza in the LXIII Congress or the PRD, the MC or PES in the LXIV Congress, the differences between the male deputies and female deputies are important. The percentage of male deputies with at least one bill on women’s issues from the total number of male deputies by party shows that male deputies affiliated with minority parties in Congress have been more active than those affiliated with majority parties. The differences between members of minority parties and majority parties, and their commitment to the gender agenda, is noteworthy.

One party setting the agenda on women's rights and issues can have a direct effect on the content and themes that the bills address. A left-wing party's control of the agenda could mean much more feminist and liberal content, while right-wing party control could mean much more conservative content. In the case of the Congresses studied, the parties involved are clearly diverse. However, the substantial participation of legislators from minority parties stands out. For this reason, it is necessary to contemplate the possibility that other factors linked to leadership could affect the success of the gender agenda.

Length of congressional service

Previous studies have demonstrated that lawmakers with many years of service are more successful in pushing larger proportions of their legislative agendas (Taylor, 2019; Volden et al., 2013). Access to money, media, and legislators' expertise provide lawmakers with an advantage over junior colleagues. Long-built bonds and probable party positions often provide additional support to senior members. This is particularly important to consider in the context of gender and politics. As Volden, Wiseman and Wittmer (2013) pointed out, seniority is particularly significant for women as, in many cases, they yet have to attain comparable levels of seniority to their male counterparts, which can cause structural disadvantages that are apparent when law-making effectiveness is assessed. The data analysed for both Congresses do not reveal surprising information. Yet, the data is important for understanding and theorizing on law-making effectiveness, particularly on women's issues.

First, the oldest political parties within the Mexican party system, PAN, PRD and PRI, hold the highest average length of service for all deputies. This itself is not surprising, as party members have been part of government for many years now. However, there are important gaps among female and male representatives, especially in the LXIV Congress. The most notable difference in the previous length of service between male and female representatives is observed among PRD deputies, where the average length of years served is 2 to 9, respectively.

Second, minority parties show a shortest average length of service in comparison to most established political parties, and a wide gap between male and female deputies. That is the case of PVEM, PES and MC. The latter particularly in the LXIII Congress. The most important exception to this behaviour is MORENA, which shows a short average length of service, both as a minority party and as a majority party. This is probably because the party was only recently formed. In 2014 it was granted party registration and participated in its first elections in 2015. Although the party's elites came from other parties and had years of experience, it would seem that the vast majority of its legislators had their first experiences in 2015.

Third, when data on the number of bills sponsored is taken into account, despite the fact of lack of experience nor service, MORENA and PES female deputies

have sponsored more bills on women's issues in the LXIV Congress than long-standing parties. A reduced length of service, prevalent among MORENA and PES lawmakers, may be somehow compensated by the resources of a majoritarian coalition.

Table 2
Average length of service by party (in years)

	LXIII Congress			LXIV Congress		
Political Party	All deputies	Female Deputies	Male Deputies	All deputies	Female Deputies	Male Deputies
MC	3.5	3.8	3	1.9	1.2	4.2
Morena	0.7	0.6	0.8	1.3	0.7	2.8
Nueva Alianza	0.4	0	1	—	—	—
PAN	3.2	3.6	2.6	4	3	5.5
PES	1.3	0	4.5	0.9	1.1	0.5
PRD	3.9	3.2	5	3.3	2	9
PRI	3.9	4.1	3.5	4.3	3.7	6.6
PT	—	—	—	2.5	2.1	4
PVEM	3	2	6	6	0	9
Average	3.2	3.1	3.3	2.5	1.9	4.2

Source: Own calculation based on information from the *Gaceta Parlamentaria*.

Fourth, the gap in the average length of service between female and male deputies grew between the LXIII Congress and the LXIV Congress. In the former, the average number of years served was almost the same for both female and male deputies, at 3.1 and 3.3 (see Table 2). This changed as the number of elected female deputies increased. In the LXIV Congress, fresh voices with little experience were elected from a relatively new political party, MORENA. Thus, the average number of years of service among female deputies decreased to 1.9 years while the average number of years of service among male deputies increased to 4.2 years (see Table 2).

The drop in the average number of years of service may be explained by the sudden requirement political parties had to comply with, at least 50% of the nominations with women due to the parity rule's enforcement. These differences among lawmakers are also present when female and male leadership positions are examined.

Leadership positions

Seniority in Congress not only refers to years of service or the resources and connections needed to promote one's agenda on any subject—in this case, women's issues. Seniority also means access to certain positions within Congress. Congressional commissions play a central role in policymaking. Berry and Fowler (2018) contended that commission membership is a key driver of legislative influence. Chairs have higher legislative effectiveness (Volden & Wiseman, 2014, 2016) and drive formal and informal powers to effectively push or block specific issues. Thus, becoming chair of a commission is critical for advancing a certain legislative agenda. The prevailing lack of experience among female legislators, in terms of years of service in elected positions, directly influences their chances of chairing a commission and promoting specific issues among colleagues.

In the Mexican Chamber of Deputies, laws are made through 46 commissions. In addition to these, there are three collegiate bodies that direct the flow of parliamentary work: the Board of Directors, the Political Coordination Board, and the Dean's Board. The former is the most relevant and hierarchical, responsible for referring bills to the appropriate commissions. Membership in any of these three or a position as chair of any of the commissions grants hierarchy among the members of the Chamber of Deputies. It provides a platform to influence legislative work and the results themselves (Aparicio & Langston, 2009; Béjar, 2009; Davila & Caballero, 2005; Nacif, 2004).

The data analysed shows first, that in both Congresses most deputies who initiated legislation on women's issues were not members of any of the boards, nor did they chair any of commissions (i.e., they did not hold leadership positions). In the LXIII Congress, 104 female deputies and 48 male deputies sponsored at least one bill on women's issues, but only 38.1% either chaired a commission or were members of the collegiate bodies (see Table 5). In the LXIV Congress, there was a decrease in the number of deputies who initiated legislation on women's issues and at the same time chaired commissions or were members of the directive bodies of the Chamber. Of the 188 deputies who sponsored at least one bill on women's issues (136 female and 52 male), only 10.6% were in positions of leadership. This means that in both congresses, only a few lawmakers pushing women's issues held leadership positions in Congress.

Second, taking into account the proportions of male and female deputies who had sponsored at least one piece of legislation on women's issues, the data shows that slightly more male deputies in leadership positions promote this type of legislation. In the LXIII Congress, 39.6% male deputies and 37.5% female deputies sponsoring women's issues were in leadership positions. In the LXIV Congress, there were 19.2% male deputies and 14.7% female deputies (See Table 3). Finally, there are no particular differences observed among majority and minority parties, nor between well-established parties with decades of experience and recently created political parties.

Table 3
Number of deputies in leadership positions who have sponsored bills on women's issues

	LXIII Congress				LXIV Congress			
	Female deputies with one bill on women's issues	Female deputies in leadership positions	Male deputies with one bill on women's issues	Male deputies in leadership	Female deputies with one bill on women's issues	Female deputies in leadership	Male deputies with one bill on women's issues	Male deputies in leadership
Political Parties								
MC	10	4	5	3	16	2	5	1
Morena	5	3	4	1	49	9	17	3
Nueva Alianza	5	0	3	1	-	-	-	-
PAN	16	8	9	2	24	3	12	2
PES	5	3	2	2	8	2	6	2
PRD	14	6	9	3	7	2	2	0
PRI	40	11	13	6	21	4	5	2
PT	-	-	-	-	10	2	3	0
PVEM	9	4	3	1	1	1	2	1
Total	104	39	48	19	136	20	52	10

Source: Own calculation based on information from *Gaceta Parlamentaria* and *Sistema de Información Legislativa*

The above findings do not mean that fewer women are in leadership positions. They mean that fewer female and male deputies who chair commissions or are members of the collegiate bodies are initiating pieces of legislation on women's issues. This may be linked certain considerations pertaining the assignment of commission chairs, such as lawmakers' length of service before their election to Congress. However, the deputy's belonging to leadership positions could have significant implications for the success of the bills drafted and presented. If the leadership of Congress and its commissions are less keen to advance legislation on women's issues, part of the gender agenda could struggle and important legislation could fail.

The importance of lawmakers' identities for women's issues: The absence of critical actors in the Mexican Congress

Women transform Congress. However, this does not mean that everyone does it at the same pace or with the same depth. The substantive representation of women in Congress requires empowered legislators. In both Mexican Congresses LXIII and LXIV, it is possible to argue, first, that with higher numbers female deputies did become much more involved and increased the number of bills sponsored in each session. This article questioned the idea that it might be possible for an increase in the number of women elected to affect the substantive representation of women. The above data allows to argue that legislative work has been carried out mainly by women but this has not necessarily led to noticeable results. In fact, of the 840 bills sponsored by a single deputy only 40 (4.8%) were approved in plenary session and sent to the Senate to continue the legislative process and another 15 (1.8%) have been published; the rest were either concluded, withdrawn, or given an extension for the commission to approve them. An extension is often a form of freezing these initiatives. In the LXIII Congress, 3 bills ultimately were published and became laws, 33 were sent to Senate.

This lead to the second and most important conclusion. It is possible to content that critical actors advancing legislation on women's issues are scarce in the Mexican Chamber of Deputies. This is due to a combination of female deputies in majority parties not as engaged as female deputies in minority parties, to few male and female deputies in leadership positions sponsoring bills on women's issues, and to female and male deputies who are sponsoring women's issues through bills but who do not have much previous legislative experience, as in number of years previously served.

The individuals who advance women's issues are mostly female deputies, which in itself is not surprising. What is important is that the data shows that not all female legislators nor parties are equally engaged. A small number of deputies are responsible for the vast majority of the pieces of legislation initiated. The deputies who advance legislation on women's issues are mostly female and members of minority parties. This combine with a lack of previous legislative experience, neither in local nor national politics and thus, with no leadership within congress, has resulted in an

agenda mostly advance by junior figures, and seldom critical actors, with high levels of experience and power in congress, involved in the process. In fact, only 24.3% of the 840 bills sponsored by individual members were sponsored by deputies in leadership positions and only 20.5% of these bills were sponsored by deputies with more than 6 years of previous legislative experience. Even more, only 27.7% of the bills published were advanced by legislators in leadership positions, and only 25.6% of these bills were sponsored by deputies with previous legislative experience. What is important to understand also, is that the data so far, does not show a direct connection between the success of a bill (as in been published) and the position within congress the deputy sponsoring it holds.

This may explain why women's issues are not approved and most bills die within standing commissions. This path of inquiry must be further developed. For now, this Mexican case study suggests that women's substantive representation may not be achieved, even with high levels of women in office, if critical actors are not involved in advancing women's issues. A sex-based equal composition of Congress is the way to go, but it is not the goal itself. If legislative actors, female and male, are to provoke change, they ought to be backed by strong members within their parties. Successful legislation may be accomplished if work is conducted through collective bodies and sponsored by groups with high standing, such as parliamentary groups, the Senate, and even the president.

This article has shown that certain key factors pertaining the legislators experience are crucial for understanding the lack of success legislation on women's issues has experienced over the past six years. This does not mean that the work carried out in the Mexican Congress is not important. It means that for legislation on women's issues to be approved and deployed as public policy, it must be accompanied by members in Congress with more experience and power within the institution. Furthermore, the increase in the number of women must be mirrored by an increase in the number of women in critical positions. Structural differences exist between men and women that have affected the positioning of women on equal standing with men in important collegiate bodies. Thus, elected women, even those with little experience, must be allowed to reach these positions. It may be time to think of a way of gendering key congressional positions in order to substantially transform the identity of the needed critical actors.

In conclusion, descriptive equality is being achieved and is likely to take hold in the system. Now it is time for this descriptive representation to lead to the empowerment of these women. Perhaps this legislative capacity, derived from experience, the resources that come with it, and the power that key positions provide, will produce a more substantive representation of women's issues. It is either time for current critical actors to engage or it is time for critical actors to be formed and provoke change in a not so distant future.

References

- Aparicio, J. & Langston, J. (2009). *Committee Leadership Selection without Seniority: The Mexican Case* (No. 217).
- Barnes, T. D. (2016). *Gendering Legislative Behavior*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316534281>
- Beer, C. (2017). Left Parties and Violence against Women Legislation in Mexico. *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society*, 24(4), 511–537. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sp/jxx017>
- Béjar, L. (2009). Élités parlamentarias en México: Los presidentes de comisiones. In L. Béjar (Ed.), *¿Qué hacen los legisladores en México?* (pp. 65–98). UNAM-Porrúa.
- Berry, C. R. & Fowler, A. (2018). Congressional committees, legislative influence, and the hegemony of chairs. *Journal of Public Economics*, 158, 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpubeco.2017.12.002>
- Carroll, S. (1994). *Women As Candidates in American Politics*. Indiana University Press.
- Celis, K. & Childs, S. (2008). Introduction: The Descriptive and Substantive Representation of Women: New Directions. *Parliamentary Affairs*, 61(3), 419–425. <https://doi.org/10.1093/pa/gsn006>
- Cervantes, V., Barba, E. & Tafolla, P. (2019). Presencia y representación de las mujeres en el Congreso del Estado de Guanajuato. *Revista de El Colegio de San Luis*, 9(20), 493–529.
- Chaney, P. (2012). Critical Actors vs. Critical Mass: The Substantive Representation of Women in the Scottish Parliament. *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 14(3), 441–457. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-856X.2011.00467.x>
- Childs, S. & Krook, M. L. (2008). Critical mass theory and women's political representation. *Political Studies*, 56(3), 725–736. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9248.2007.00712.x>
- Childs, S. & Krook, M. L. (2009). Analysing women's substantive representation: From critical mass to critical actors. *Government and Opposition*, 44(2), 125–145. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1477-7053.2009.01279.x>
- Curry, J. M. & Haydon, M. R. (2018). Lawmaker Age, Issue Salience, and Senior Representation in Congress. *American Politics Research*, 46(4), 567–595. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1532673X18754557>
- Dahlerup, D. (1988). From a Small to a Large Minority: Women in Scandinavian Politics. *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 11(4), 275–298. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9477.1988.tb00372.x>

- Dahlerup, D. (2006). The story of the theory of critical mass. *Politics & Gender*, 2(4), 511–522.
- Davila, D. & Caballero, L. (2005). *El sistema de comisiones, el cabildeo legislativo y la participación ciudadana en el Congreso mexicano*.
- Dodson, D. & Carroll, S. (1991). *Reshaping the Agenda: Women in State Legislature*. Center for the American Women in Politics, Rutgers University.
- Dodson, D. L. (2006). *The Impact of Women in Congress*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/0198296746.001.0001>
- Duverger, M. (1955). *La Participation des femmes à la vie politique*. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.
- Erzeel, S. & Celis, K. (2016). Political parties, ideology and the substantive representation of women. *Party Politics*, 22(5), 576–586. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068816655561>
- Favela, A. (2015). *Participación Política de las Mujeres en la Actualidad y sus Retos. Procesos Electorales Federal y Locales 2015*. https://portalanterior.ine.mx/archivos3/portal/historico/recursos/IFE-v2/DEPPP/DEPPP-Varios/Foro_ImpactoyProspectivas/docs/adrianafavela3dic.pdf
- Franceschet, S. (2011). Gender policy and state architecture in Latin America. In *Politics and Gender* (Vol. 7, Issue 2, pp. 273–279). <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X11000110>
- Franceschet, S. & Piscopo, J. M. (2008). Gender Quotas and Women's Substantive Representation: Lessons from Argentina. *Politics and Gender*, 4(3), 393–425. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X08000342>
- García Méndez, E. (2019). Representación política de las mujeres en los Congresos subnacionales en México. Un modelo de evaluación. *Estudios Políticos*, 46(46), 73–98. <https://doi.org/10.22201/fcpys.24484903e.2019.46.68289>
- Heath, R. M., Schwindt-Bayer, L. A. & Taylor-Robinson, M. M. (2005). Women on the sidelines: Women's representation on committees in Latin American legislatures. *American Journal of Political Science*, 49(2), 420–436. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0092-5853.2005.00132.x>
- Htun, M. & Jones, M. (2002). Engendering the Right to Participate in Decision-making: Electoral Quotas and Women's Leadership in Latin America. In N. Craske & M. Molyneux (Eds.), *Gender and the politics of rights and democracy in Latin America* (pp. 32–56). Palgrave MacMillan.
- Kerevel, Y. (2010). The legislative consequences of Mexico's mixed-member electoral system, 2000–2009. *Electoral Studies*, 29(4), 691–703. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2010.07.004>

- Kittilson, M. C. (1999). Women's Representation in Parliament. *Party Politics*, 5(1), 79–98. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068899005001005>
- Kittilson, M. C. (2001). Political Parties and the Adoption of Candidate Gender Quotas: A Cross-National Analysis. *The Journal of Politics*, 63(4), 1214–1229. <https://doi.org/10.1111/0022-3816.00107>
- Macaulay, F. (2005). *Cross-party alliances around gender agendas: critical mass, critical actors, critical structures, or critical junctures?* https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/eql-men/docs/EP.12_Macaulay.pdf
- Mackay, F. (2008). 'Thick' Conceptions of Substantive Representation: Women, Gender and Political Institutions. *Representation*, 44(2), 125–139. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00344890802079607>
- Matland, R. E. & Studlar, D.T. (1996). The contagion of women candidates in single-member district and proportional representation electoral systems: Canada and Norway. *Journal of Politics*, 58(3), 707–733. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2960439>
- Murray, R. (2013). Quotas, Citizens, and Norms of Representation. *Politics & Gender*, 9(03), 304–309. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X13000172>
- Nacif, B. (2004). Las relaciones entre los poderes ejecutivo y legislativo tras el fin del presidencialismo en México. *Política y Gobierno*, 11(1), 9–41.
- Norris, P. (1996). Women Politicians: Transforming Westminster? *Parliamentary Affairs*, 49(1), 89–102.
- Norris, Pippa & Lovenduski, J. (2009). Puzzles in political recruitment. In M. Krook & S. Childs (Eds.), *Political Recruitment* (pp. 1–18). Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511598609.002>
- O'Neill, B. & Stewart, D. K. (2009). Gender and Political Party Leadership in Canada. *Party Politics*, 15(6), 737–757. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068809342526>
- Piscopo, J. M. (2011). *Do women represent women? : gender and policy in Argentina and Mexico*. UC San Diego.
- Piscopo, J. M. (2014). Beyond Hearth and Home: Female Legislators, Feminist Policy Change, and Substantive Representation in Mexico. *Revista Uruguaya de Ciencia Política*, 23(2), 87–110.
- Pitkin, H. F. (1967). *The Concept of Representation*. University of California Press.
- Reingold, B. (2000). *Representing Women: Sex, Gender, and Legislative Behavior in Arizona and California*. University of North Carolina.

- Rule, W. (1987). Electoral Systems, Contextual Factors and Women's Opportunity for Election to Parliament in Twenty-Three Democracies. *The Western Political Quarterly*, 40(3), 477. <https://doi.org/10.2307/448386>
- Schwindt-Bayer, L. A. (2006). Still supermadres? Gender and the policy priorities of Latin American legislators. In *American Journal of Political Science* (Vol. 50, Issue 3, pp. 570–585). <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5907.2006.00202.x>
- Schwindt-Bayer, L. A. & Alles, S. (2018). *Women in Legislatures* (Vol. 1). Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190851224.003.0004>
- Severs, E., Celis, K. & Erzeel, S. (2016). Power, privilege and disadvantage: Intersectionality theory and political representation. *Politics*, 36(4), 346–354. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263395716630987>
- Studlar, D. T. & Matland, R. E. (1994). The Growth of Women's Representation in the Canadian House of Commons and the Election of 1984: A Reappraisal. *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, 27(1), 53–79. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0008423900006211>
- Swers, M. L. (2002). *The Difference Women Make: The Policy Impact of Women in Congress*. University of Chicago Press.
- Taylor, A. J. (2019). Legislative Seniority in the Partisan Congress*. *Social Science Quarterly*, 100(4), 1297–1307. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ssqu.12616>
- Thomas, S. & Welch, S. (1991). The Impact of Gender on Activities and Priorities of State Legislators. *Political Research Quarterly*, 44(2), 445–456. <https://doi.org/10.1177/106591299104400212>
- Volden, C. & Wiseman, A. (2014). *Legislative Effectiveness in the United States Congress: The Lawmakers*. Cambridge University Press.
- Volden, C. & Wiseman, A. (2016). *Are Bipartisan Lawmakers More Effective?* (No. 4; Research Concentration: Legislative Politics and Policymaking).
- Volden, C., Wiseman, A. E. & Wittmer, D. E. (2013). When Are Women More Effective Lawmakers Than Men? *American Journal of Political Science*, 57(2), 326–341. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12010>
- Wagnerud, L. (2000). Representing Women. In P. Esaiasson & K. Heidar (Eds.), *Beyond Westminster and Congress: The Nordic Experience* (pp. 132–154). The Ohio State University Press.

Recibido: 29 de marzo de 2022

Aceptado: 17 de junio de 2022

