

Effects of Institutional Reforms on Women's Representation in Colombia, 1960–2014

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ABSTRACT

Starting in the 1990s, reforms aimed at addressing the underrepresentation of women have been implemented in Colombia. However, research on the consequences of these reforms has been inconclusive. This article analyzes the influence of institutional variables on the proportion of nominated and elected women in Colombia between 1962 and 2014, at both the national and local levels of government, in three different institutional environments. Results confirm the influence of institutional change, indicating that decentralizing reforms and the introduction of the gender quota have had a positive impact on the proportion of women's candidacies and elections, but that the adoption of the open list negatively affected the percentage of elected women.

Since the early 1990s, Colombia has experimented with institutional reforms to address, among other democratic flaws, the underrepresentation of women in political office. The 1991 constitutional reform facilitated the entry of minority parties into key policymaking positions, reduced the role of party leaders in the nomination of candidates, and raised the number of actors competing for office. Seeking to increase legislators' attention to programmatic issues, the 2003 electoral reform strengthened the role of parties by requiring that they present a single list in each electoral district and allowing them to run under closed lists. More recently, in 2011, legislation was adopted that required lists competing in districts of five seats and up to use a 30 percent gender quota. Despite efforts to encourage the representation of women, Colombia has historically lagged behind other Latin American nations (Schwindt-Bayer 2011). At the same time, demand for representation on issues concerning women continues to grow, creating pressures for the adoption of legislation that further promotes the inclusion of women in government.

Any effort in the direction of trying to increase women's representation in Colombia should start with a careful analysis of the historical trends, as well as an understanding of how previous attempts at reform affected women's numerical pres-

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ence. However, existing research has produced little to no consensus on the causes of underrepresentation and the effects of institutional reforms on the percentage of nominated and elected women in Colombia. A substantial number of scholars draw attention to the influence of culture and the values of Colombian society as a main explanatory factor (Wills 2007). Yet 30 years of comparative research stresses the significance of electoral institutions for encouraging change. A handful of studies focus on the effect of institutions on the election of women in Colombia (Bernal Olarte 2006a, b, 2008), but they cover limited time periods, evaluate data on only one level of government, and fail to properly analyze the independent effect of reforms, as they observe only aggregate measures of change across districts.

On the other hand, the comparative literature has advanced in finding some consistent results on the effect of the type of electoral system, the structure of the ballot, and quota legislation on women's representation, but less so on the mechanisms through which institutional features affect the election of women; and the extent to which they operate by decreasing barriers to either candidacy or election is still under dispute. Moreover, it is not clear whether specific institutional rules have an independent effect or must be adopted in conjunction with other electoral laws. There is also disagreement on how extensively institutional effects will persist across different political settings and office types.

The objective of this article is twofold. First, it analyzes trends in women's descriptive representation in Colombia since the return to democracy in 1958 (when women gained the right to vote) and evaluates the effect of three major institutional reforms on the election of women to political office. It uses an original district-level dataset on Colombian candidates running for legislative positions at both the national (House of Representatives) and subnational (municipal councils and departmental assemblies) levels of government from 1962 to 2014 (Pachón and Sánchez 2014). In doing so, it is the first longitudinal district-level quantitative study of women's representation in Colombia.

Second, this article seeks to contribute to broader debates on the effects of institutions on the election of women. The extensive single-country dataset allows us to compare women's representation before and after several law changes within electoral districts and across a variety of political contexts, and to explore the influence of institutions on both the candidacy and the election of women, while also allowing more control for cultural factors. Colombia is an excellent case study, since many of the institutional variables that the literature considers relevant have undergone some degree of transformation.

When compared with other countries in the region, the Observatorio de Igualdad de Género de América Latina y el Caribe (2012) highlights how Colombia falls below the regional average of the proportion of women in the legislature (23.2 percent, lower chamber where bicameral). By 2012, Colombia stood just above Brazil (9 percent) but below most of Latin American countries, such as Chile (14 percent), Peru (22 percent), Mexico (26 percent), and Argentina (37 percent). The same is true for the case of intermediate-level legislative arenas (i.e., departmental assemblies). Female participation in these arenas in Colombia is greater than Brazil's (13

percent) but lower than in other countries, such as Ecuador (19 percent), Peru (28 percent), and Argentina (30 percent) (PNUD 2013). The panorama in municipal councils is no more encouraging. In local legislative bodies, Colombia is once again among the countries whose female participation figures are below the regional average, although it has seen slightly upward progress (PNUD 2013).

The adoption of the 1991 Constitution increased the average percentage of women nominated and elected in municipal councils and the House of Representatives by removing barriers that restricted the political participation of minorities in most electoral districts. These changes triggered a steady growth in the average percentage of nominated and elected women at the local level, but less so at the national and departmental levels. Consistent with some of the findings in the literature (Htun 2002; Htun and Jones 2002; Schmidt 2009), we find that women did better getting nominated under more candidate-oriented arrangements, such as the one resulting from the 1991 constitutional reform, and even under the 2003 electoral reform, but faced limits to their overall success in achieving higher elected offices. The adoption of the quota in 2011 significantly increased the percentage of female candidates at all levels of government, but because most parties chose to compete under the open list, the quota did not translate to an equivalent rate of female politicians being elected.

Thus, the effect of quota laws and other reforms aimed at increasing women's representation in publicly elected institutions can vary within one municipality, even within the same election, and it depends very much on the historical tendency of female participation and the type of office. Although the enactment of the quota meant a significant improvement at the local and national levels, it might take some more electoral cycles to observe how much it increases the percentage of elected women.

This article proceeds as follows. First, it summarizes the literature on the institutional determinants of women's representation, with an emphasis on the electoral system, the structure of the ballot, and quota legislation. Then it details the electoral reforms; describes local councils, department assemblies, and the House of Representatives; and presents expectations regarding the reform's effects on the candidacy and election of women. It describes the historical trends of nominated and elected women in Colombia, and then presents the main results of models analyzing the effect of institutional variables. The concluding section discusses current challenges to women's equal representation in Colombia, as well as the implications of the findings for the broader literature.

THE INSTITUTIONAL DETERMINANTS OF FEMALE REPRESENTATION

Over the past three decades, institutional arrangements have been a major focus of the literature on women's underrepresentation. Overall, existing work suggests that differences in the type of electoral system, the structure of the ballot, and the design of quota legislation explain a large portion of cross-country and subnational variation in the election of women to political office. Although scholars concur on the potential of institutional arrangements to reduce underrepresentation, the signifi-

cance of specific institutional features, the mechanisms through which they operate, and whether they have an independent or conditional effect are still in dispute.

The type of electoral system is one of the earliest institutional variables explored by this literature. Proportional representation (PR) electoral systems have been widely known to promote the election of women when compared to single-member district plurality or majority runoff electoral systems (Hughes and Paxton 2007; Larsrud and Taphorn 2007; Matland 2005; Norris 2004; Rule 1987; Schmidt 2009; Yoon 2004). A higher district magnitude usually increases the number of seats a party wins in an electoral district (party magnitude). Under higher party magnitudes, leaders are expected to nominate a more diverse body of candidates, including women (Matland 1993, 2005).

In PR systems, higher district magnitudes also encourage a greater number of parties to compete (Duverger 1955; Lijphart 1994). Consequently, higher district magnitudes promote the election of women by increasing competitiveness and turnover (Matland 1993; Norris 2004). Minority parties, which are more likely to nominate women, also fare better under higher district magnitudes in PR systems (Rule 1987; Jones 1993). PR can also aid the election of women because the process of “contagion,” by which parties follow policies initiated by other political competitors, is more likely to occur relative to plurality or majority systems (Matland 2005).

In PR systems, several factors can condition the effect of district size on the election of women. The seat allocation formula may play a relevant role; some scholars argue that variants that benefit small parties, such as the Hare formula, can increase female representation, relative to variants that favor larger parties, such as D’Hondt (Rule 1994). Others note that although increasing the number of small parties in competition is important, it must be balanced by maintaining moderate to large party magnitudes. Higher electoral thresholds, for example, can favor the election of women by decreasing the number of parties that win one or two seats, which most probably would have been occupied by men (Matland 1998).

The open or closed nature of lists can also weaken the impact of PR on women’s representation, although there is less consensus on the superiority of any variant. Earlier studies favor open or flexible lists to increase the election of women (Rule and Shugart 1995; Shugart 1994). In open-list arrangements, voters cast ballots for specific candidates on a list and can move women higher on the list. These types of systems generally encourage candidates to cultivate a personal vote (Carey and Shugart 1995). More personalistic systems might enhance female representation because parties cannot reduce the chances of election of candidates by placing them well down on the list. Since parties can exclude women from their lists or place them in lower positions on the list, closed list has the potential to override the positive impact of high district magnitudes (Rule 1994; Shugart 1994).

In contrast, a second group of studies promotes the use of closed-list arrangements in which voters choose among party lists and party leaders determine the positions of the candidates on their lists. These studies argue that the effect of higher district magnitudes is weakened using open-list when compared to closed-list systems (Htun 2002; Htun and Jones 2002; Schmidt 2009). Some, however, question

whether closed-list arrangements are effective only when combined with well-designed quota legislation (Matland 2006; Schmidt and Saunders 2004).

Other scholars argue that the effect of the ballot type depends on the openness of voters to the election of women, relative to the openness of party leaders. If party elites are more progressive than the party's voters, the use of a closed list will promote the election of women. Under open list, the electorate, rather than party elites, determines who will occupy seats won by the party. Hence, only when voters are more progressive than elites are women more likely to be elected under open-list arrangements (Larserud and Taphorn 2007; Matland 2006; Valdini 2013).

Furthermore, several studies highlight the importance of quota legislation in promoting women's representation (Dahlerup 2006; Larserud and Taphorn 2007; Matland 2005; Tripp and Kang 2008; Yoon 2004). However, the use of quotas in the absence of placement mandates, strong enforcement mechanisms, closed list, or moderate-to-large districts might not generate an increase in the number of elected women. Although quotas might increase the number of female candidates, in the absence of placement mandates (which are not operative in open-list systems), parties can legally fulfill the quota laws by placing female candidates in unelectable positions (Htun and Jones 2002; Jones 2009; Krook 2005; Larserud and Taphorn 2007; Norris 2004; Schmidt 2009; Schwindt-Bayer 2009).

Many questions remain about the effect of institutions on the election of women, including whether each of the dimensions of the electoral system has an independent effect or is effective only when used in combination with another, and what the mechanisms are through which features of the electoral system affect women's representation. The literature on institutional effects generally omits questions about whether the obstacles for women to achieve political office lie at the candidacy stage, at the election stage, or both. Because barriers to entry might differ across diverse political settings, some electoral reforms might have an impact on some cases while failing to generate a significant effect on others. Other electoral reforms might have similar effects through different pathways.

Likewise, more complex temporal dependencies between the candidacy of women and their election in subsequent races are often overlooked. For example, the implementation of quota legislation in an open-list system, while not having a direct, immediate effect on the election of women, can have an effect later if the primary factor underlying underrepresentation was the absence of female candidates with political experience.

Moreover, while the literature suggests that electoral laws should similarly affect the election of women in different levels of government (after controlling for cultural variables), there are reasons to expect that institutional variables will behave differently depending on the type of office under study (Pini and McDonald 2011). Consider the case of an electoral rule applied to multiple levels of government in a single country. Subnational offices might be perceived as lower-stake offices, which may affect the degree to which parties interfere with the candidacy of a woman, even under smaller district magnitudes. Similarly, lower offices might be perceived as less risky races for female politicians, relative to higher levels of office. These are but a

few examples of how the type of office can interfere with our ability to understand the effect of an institutional reform, once assumptions about the motivations of party leaders and female politicians are no longer fixed across settings.

In part, the difficulty in understanding this complexity stems from methodological challenges faced by the current literature. To date, studies of the impact of institutional variables on the election of women have fallen mostly into two general categories. The first set makes use of aggregate national-level data for cross-national analysis (Htun and Jones 2002; Matland 1998; Norris 2004; Reynolds 1999; Rule 1987; Tripp and Kang 2008). A shortcoming of these types of studies is that they can confound the effects of the political culture with those of institutions, given that measurements of cultural determinants of women's representation are generally crude (Roberts et al. 2013). These studies also use problematic aggregate measures, such as mean district magnitudes, which makes it hard to distinguish the effects of the electoral system from those of the district size (Hickman 1997). A second group of studies uses district-level data or party-district-level data to compare aggregate percentages of women elected in the same country under different electoral systems (Jones 2004; Schmidt and Saunders 2004). However, most studies have suffered from a lack of electoral system and quota legislation variance at the intracountry level, typically focusing on a limited set of institutional changes.

This study takes advantage of the diversity of electoral rules used in a single country by exploring the election of women to numerous offices over a 50-year period. The electoral variation comes from both nationwide electoral reforms over this extensive period and from the use of different types of electoral arrangements across elections at different levels of government. This allows us to compare women's representation before and after several law changes and across a variety of political contexts while also allowing some degree of control for cultural factors. In addition, we explore the effect of these institutional variations on both the candidacy and election of women, allowing us to understand how electoral configurations influence both barriers of entry to political office.

INSTITUTIONAL REFORMS AND FEMALE REPRESENTATION IN COLOMBIA

Three important institutional changes occurred between 1962 and 2014 that possibly influenced the incentives for candidacy and election of women in Colombia.

The 1991 Constitutional Reform

Before the 1991 Constitution was adopted, members of both the Senate and the House of Representatives were elected in multimember, department-level districts under a formally closed-list system. However, since parties were not limited in the number of lists to be introduced per district, and seats were assigned to lists, the system was essentially a single, nontransferable vote system (Cox and Shugart 1995). This intraparty competition enhanced the value of the candidates' personal reputa-

tions. Nevertheless, party machines were still fundamental for election logistics, as ballots were provided by candidates and party organizations, making it very difficult for independent candidates to effectively distribute their own ballots in their district.

As a prelude to the 1991 Constitution, during the Constituent Assembly campaign, the National Registrar's Office (*Registraduría Nacional del Estado Civil*) was mandated to provide a single ballot per office to guarantee the equal right of every citizen to participate in elections, taking the election logistics out of the hands of traditional parties.

Although the 1991 Constituent Assembly did not change the electoral rules themselves, it did alter various aspects that affected how candidates and politicians behaved in the electoral system. First, the establishment of political and fiscal decentralization meant a significant diminution of the president's capacity to "keep the party together," as mayors and governors could be elected independently from the central, national-level political campaigns. Second, the Senate became a one-hundred-seat national constituency, which allowed for extreme proportionality, rebalancing urban representation in Congress. Third, postelection public campaign funding (approved in 1994 by Congress) made the candidates—instead of the party organizations—the recipients. This meant, in practice, not only high intraparty fragmentation but a very significant increase in the number of parties and independent candidates competing in elections.

Consequently, after the enactment of the 1991 Constitution, the system became even more personalized, as candidates from all political and social movements could nominate themselves and control their own finances and campaigns. In contrast to the 1886 Constitution, the 1991 Constitution allowed the creation of "political movements" and loosened the requirements to gain legal recognition. These left politicians with even fewer incentives to build their political careers on party platforms (Shugart et al. 2007).

As the literature discussion noted, the effect of a personalized ballot structure and candidate-based electoral laws on the candidacy and election of women is disputed; many scholars argue that women fare better under party-oriented, closed lists, and others claim that the effect depends on the progressiveness of the party's elites relative to the progressiveness of its electors. When referring to this period, scholars have noted that between 1991 and 2003, the extreme political fragmentation "was perhaps the only possibility of participation for women coming from communal, community or citizen processes outside of the political parties to have access to a position of political representation" (Bernal Olarte 2006b, 12).

Thus, our first expectation is that between 1991 and 2003, women candidates should be more capable of competing effectively inside and outside the political parties, leading to an increase in the proportion of nominated and elected women compared to the pre-1991 period in all offices.

The 2003 Electoral Reform

The most defining feature of the 2003 electoral reform was perhaps that it moved from a personalized to a list-based electoral system. Before 2003, the system awarded seats to the top winning candidates who competed under subparty lists. After 2003, political parties could present only a single list in each electoral district. Additionally, electoral thresholds were established, with parties in the Senate needing 2 percent (after 2010, 3 percent) of all valid votes, and parties in the House needing 50 percent of the simple quota for each district to gain representation. Furthermore, the Hare quota with largest remainders was changed to the D'Hondt electoral formula. It is important to note that district magnitude remained unaltered.

These changes resulted in a decrease in the number of competing parties in larger districts and an increase in low-magnitude districts (Pachón and Shugart 2010). Reductions in the number of competing parties in larger districts have been hypothesized to have a detrimental effect on the candidacy and election of women because the party brand—instead of the personal appeal of candidates—becomes more visible, and so does the party's role in campaign funding and other electoral activities.

Moreover, the 2003 reform also established the possibility that parties could run under closed or open lists. If parties ran under closed lists, the effect of higher thresholds on districts of larger magnitude might favor women's representation, since parties would have the opportunity to publicize their position on female participation. This was the case of MIRA, a minority party that used alternation of female and male candidates for national elections (Congreso Visible 2014). In practice, however, very few parties opted to compete under closed list. The decision to elect women remained in the hands of voters.

Furthermore, the design of the ballot after the reform, which removed candidates' pictures and left only party logos and numbers for candidates, made it even more difficult to distinguish and vote for female legislators. Consequently, we expect that the rationalization of the political system achieved by the 2003 reform (stabilization of the number of parties) should not affect women's nomination but should negatively impact women's average total numbers in the electoral districts.

The Quota Adoption of 2011

The third institutional reform was the adoption of quota legislation in 2011. Law 1475 of 2011 mandated that lists competing in districts with more than five seats should include a minimum of 30 percent female candidates. Lists that did not comply with this legal requirement ought to be rejected from the ballot. Because of this legal requirement, the obvious expectation is that the proportion of female candidates in districts of size greater than 5 should increase in all levels of government. However, as noted earlier, given the use of open list in almost all district sizes and elections, the probability of these women's having a chance of being viable candidates and getting elected should continue to evolve with the previous trend established in 2003, with the electoral reform change.

Thus, our expectation is that the existence of the 30 percent quota should significantly increase the number of women candidates across all levels of government but should have a comparatively lower effect on the percentage of elected women in all types of districts, as open lists continue to be the preferred rule for most parties.

This study analyzes municipal council, departmental assembly, and House elections to observe whether reforms have different effects depending on the level of government. What happens to the performance of female candidates when there is a more rigorous electoral threshold? Do recruiting patterns differ for female and male candidates across the territory?

Colombia has a long tradition of local elections. Councils have been elected since the beginning of the republic (early nineteenth century) and are considered the seedbed of politics. This was especially true during the centralized period (1886–1986), when mayors were directly appointed by the governor (consequently, mayors did not need to have a close connection to the municipality), who in turn was elected by the Presidency. Councils served as the local political control of the national power represented by the mayor and could attract the attention of national politicians, as they were the principal political recruiters. After 1991—and after a transition toward political and fiscal decentralization—mayors became the most prominent elected office at the local level. Councils and mayors were elected every two years until 1994, every three years until 2003, and every four years since then. Re-election rates averaged 33 percent from 2000 to 2011 for the capital cities of departments.¹

Departmental assemblies are the less visible offices of the ones analyzed here (results after the 2011 reform were not included). Although assemblies were important for political recruitment, they play an ambiguous role in both the centralized and the decentralized world, in which the department plays only a subsidiary role. Each departmental assembly has a minimum of 11 members and a maximum of 31 members.

The House of Representatives is also elected at the departmental level, although the number of votes needed to get elected is significantly higher, due to a smaller district size. The average district size is 5 seats, ranging from a minimum of 2 to a maximum of 18, which is the case for Bogotá, the nation's capital. The House has a total of 14 members at the national level and is symmetrical in power (in terms of attributions and prerogatives to introduce and enact national legislation) to the Senate. Compared to the municipal councils and the assemblies, the House of Representatives represents an upper tier in the political ambition of professional politicians. Although there is wide temporal variation, the House has, on average, a re-election rate of 45 percent.

EMPIRICAL STRATEGY

We constructed two dependent variables from the available electoral data (Pachón and Sánchez 2014): the percentage of female candidates per district and the percentage of elected women per district. Our unit of analysis is the municipal or departmental election. We tested our expectations of the effect of the reforms in different types of elections: municipal councils (1994–2007), departmental assemblies (1970–2007), and the House of Representatives (1960–2014).² We coded each female in the sample by using her first name. Although there was potential for inaccuracy, we reviewed the data through several rounds to ensure that most names were accounted for. Ultimately, our file accounted for approximately 11,000 different names.

To control for some of the differences at the subnational level that might have an impact on female participation, and because we are mainly interested in changes within each district office over time and not across units of analysis, we used a fixed effects model with robust standard errors. The fixed effects per electoral district are justified in the analysis because they add value to our knowledge of the isolated effect of institutional change.

We also control for the size of the district, given the significance of this variable to establishing the proportionality of the electoral system. Given that the size of the district is highly correlated with political competition (measured as the effective number of parties), and because political competition is also an outcome variable and is not clearly exogenous from our dependent variables, we left it out of the model. Also, given the fragmentation of the political party system for most of the period studied (more than two hundred political parties or movements), we decided not to classify parties across the ideological spectrum, since there is no way to reliably go about this process at the subnational level or the national level throughout the period. As has been argued before, the proliferation of parties in the Colombian case is also a consequence of the 1991 reform (e.g., Gutiérrez 2007; Pachón 2002; Pizarro 1995).

In addition, it has been suggested that there is high path dependence in the participation of women in politics. Their success at a certain point in time could be related to the success of candidates during the previous period, as women are more likely to participate when they have observed other female candidates competing. As noted by Bhavnani (2009), voters are also more likely to see women as viable candidates when female candidates were successful in the previous period. To account for this dynamic, we include the lagged percentage of elected women as an explanatory variable in both models.

Furthermore, to capture the change entailed in each institutional reform, dummies were created to group the observations after the 1991 Constitution, the political reform of 2003, and the 2011 quota law only for districts greater than 5.³ Thus, the full model is explained in the following equation:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Percentage of nominated/elected women}_{i,t} = & \beta_0 + \beta_2 * \text{district_mag}_{i,t} \\ & + \gamma * \text{Reform}_{i,i} + \varphi * \% \text{Elected Women}_{i,t-1} + e_{i,t} \end{aligned} \quad (1)$$

in which i denotes the district, t the year when an election took place, and k the reform (1991, 2003, or 2011). We use fixed-effects model s in an unbalanced panel, since our sample differs given the historical change in the units of analysis. Also, the number of observations varies depending on the type of election and levels of aggregation of data.⁴

HISTORICAL PROGRESS OF NOMINATED AND ELECTED WOMEN IN COLOMBIA

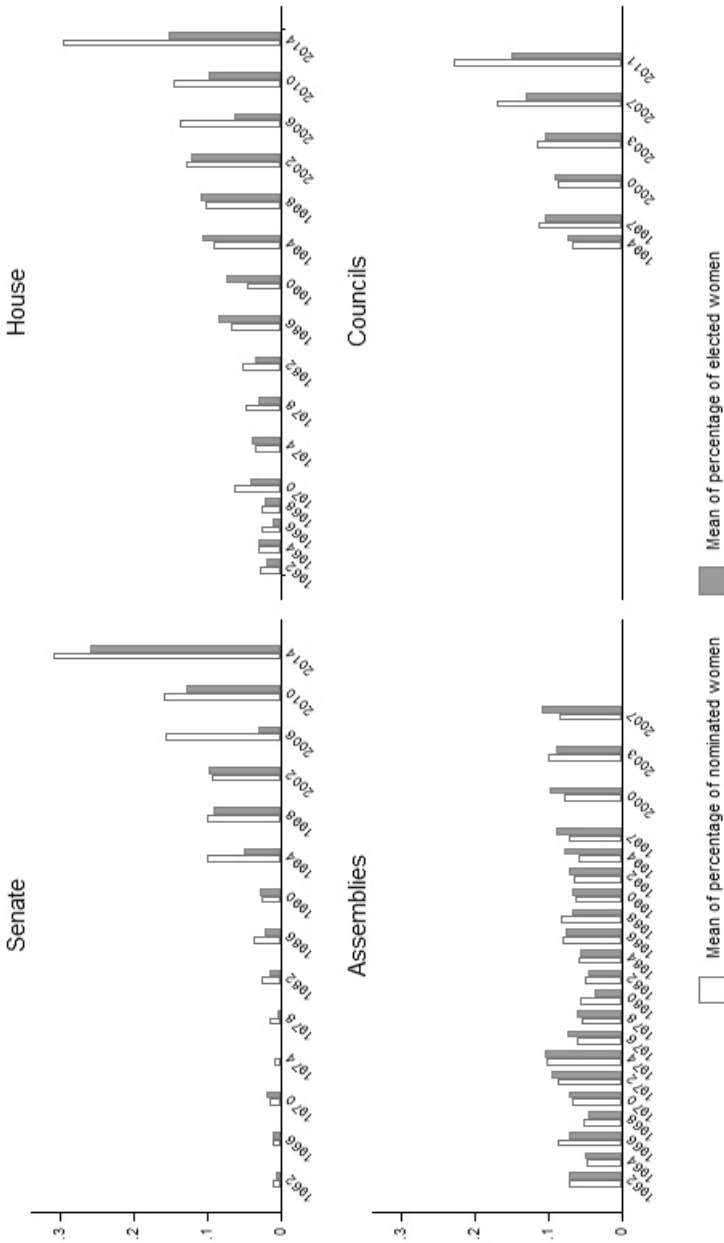
Before turning to the results, let us describe the trends in women's descriptive representation differentiated by type of office for the periods available. Figure 1 shows the average percentage of female candidates and women elected per district, per type of office. Although averages are informative, they could be misleading in the presence of high variation across observations. The empirical strategy in our analysis allows us to correct for that potential bias generated by high variation across districts.

From the descriptive data, the first thing to note when looking at the averages for the whole sample is that the Assembly data are flat, and this tendency persists for more than three decades. Women's descriptive representation remains at an average rate of 6.79 percent from 1960 to 2002. Although women's representation in assemblies is greater for all the decades before the 1991 reform when compared to the House or Senate, it seems to remain inelastic to institutional reforms, increasing only by 3 percent on average in the 2003–7 period. Municipal councils, on the other hand, start showing an incremental improvement from 9 percent (1994–2002) to 15 percent (2003–2010). For the 2011 elections, the average percentage of women's candidacies increased to 22 percent. Nevertheless, the percentage of elected women did not grow at the same pace, surpassing 15 percent only in the last election.

It is at the national level where we observe the most significant changes. (Here we compare the Senate and the House, although in the analysis the Senate is excluded.) The average percentage of elected women was 1.84 percent in the Senate and 4.23 percent in the House of Representatives between the years 1960 and 1990. These percentages increased once the 1991 Constitution was in place: women candidates performed much better in both the Senate (9.73 percent) and the House (10.3 percent). Despite this rapid increase in average percentages in nomination, effectiveness in the election of women, measured as the average percentage of women elected, was less impressive. For the period between 1991 and 2010, only 8.2 percent of the Senate seats and 10.23 percent of the House seats were allocated to women. The immediate effects of the rationalization and limitation to only one list per party brought a slight decrease in elected women. In the House of Representatives, the average of females elected per district went from 10.23 percent to 6 percent in 2006.

Even so, and allowing for the effect on the average percentage of elected women after the 2003 reform, the percentage of women candidates did not decrease. After the quota implementation in 2011, the average percentage of women candidates rose to the minimum established by law (30 percent) for all districts larger than five seats.

Figure 1. Evolution of the Average Percentage of Nominated and Elected Women, by Office Type



Source: Elaborated by the authors; data by Pachón and Sánchez 2014.

So, as we can observe, institutional reforms had a differential impact on women's participation, contingent on the office type, with some significant differences between the percentage of nominated and elected women. Analyzing the model in which we focus on the districts allows us to observe the average impact of each of the reforms on our dependent variables, to explain the average percentage of nominated women.

RESULTS

What are the relevant variables that explain the slow but incremental change in women's participation in elected office in Colombia at the municipal, departmental, and national levels? Table 1 shows the results of the regression analyses. The first two columns report the results for the municipal councils, the next two for the assemblies, and columns 5 and 6 for the House of Representatives.

Like the descriptive statistics, the model confirms an increasing trend in women's nomination average percentage in districts after the 1991 Constitution. Although we are unable to measure the effect of the 1991 Constitution for municipal councils, the average percentage of women nominated in this instance follows the increasing trend of the House of Representatives (4 percent). This would confirm that the trend manifested after 1991, with an increased personalized environment, facilitated the entry of more women into electoral politics when compared to the previous personalized but centralized model. As mentioned earlier, the ballot in use, with pictures, facilitated the use of sociodemographic cues, as did the rules allowing independent citizens to run and create political movements.

In both the councils and the House of Representatives models, we observe that the 2003 reform also had a positive impact on the nomination of female candidates, with an increase of 5 percent on average in municipalities and 8.36 percent for the average district in the House of Representatives. Also, the 2011 Reform had a positive and significant effect, increasing average nomination in councils (32.82 percent) and House districts (40.51 percent) above the 30 percent quota established.

Contrary to the described trend are the assemblies. In this case, the 1991 Constitution and the 2003 reform dummy are negative and significant for the average percentage of nominated women. Explanations of this outlier behavior could be related to women's changing their political aspirations to a different office as more attractive options opened at the regional and national levels. Especially after the decentralization reforms, assemblies became less visible and their political capacity more ambiguous. Assemblies have no legislative power and very limited power over urban areas; municipalities are responsible for the provision of public services and play only a subsidiary role in policy sectors such as education or infrastructure. Further research is required to understand how the 1991 reform affected career patterns; to observe, for example, whether these women decided to run for mayor or governor, or left electoral politics completely.

We also find that women's participation differs depending on the type of office. Comparing the average nomination between councils, assemblies, and the House of

Table 1. Results of the Fixed Effects Model for Municipal Councils, Departmental Assemblies, and the House of Representatives, 1962–2014

Average percentage of women	Municipal Councils		Departmental Assemblies		House of Representatives	
	Nominated (1)	Elected (2)	Nominated (3)	Elected (4)	Nominated (5)	Elected (6)
1991 Constitution	—	—	-0.0096 (0.0071)	0.0214** (0.0089)	0.0406*** (0.0097)	0.0342 (0.0306)
2003 Reform	0.0498*** (0.0021)	0.0271*** (0.0030)	-0.0131* (0.0067)	0.0362** (0.0139)	0.0836*** (0.0136)	0.0112 (0.0225)
2011 Reform	0.1391*** (0.0025)	0.0623*** (0.0042)	—	—	0.3305*** (0.0182)	0.1107** (0.0494)
District magnitude	-0.0085*** (0.0006)	0.0039** (0.0018)	-0.0024** (0.0010)	0.0001 (0.0013)	-0.0017 (0.0019)	-0.0046 (0.0028)
L_elected	-0.0345*** (0.0105)	-0.0662*** (0.0141)	0.0829 (0.0497)	0.1961** (0.0802)	0.0690** (0.0285)	0.1449* (0.0727)
Constant	0.1859*** (0.006)	0.0544*** (0.0194)	0.1314*** (0.0190)	0.0491* (0.0264)	0.0746*** (0.0162)	0.0830*** (0.0284)
Observations	6,234	6,098	495	494	389	384
R-squared	0.3728	0.0647	0.0182	0.0893	0.4126	0.0819
Number of muni_code	1.100	1.099				
Number of dpto_code			32	32	33	33

***p < 0.01, **p < 0.05, *p < 0.1
Robust standard errors in parentheses.

Representatives, we observe that as the electoral threshold increases (rising from local to national), women’s average nomination decreases. District magnitude is also negatively correlated with female nomination to municipal councils and departmental assemblies, and positively correlated with the percentage of elected women, although its substantive effect is small.

As we have seen, the lagged percentage of elected women is also an important variable to explain the changes in districts across municipal councils, assemblies, and the House of Representatives. Our hypothesis is that more experience and female participation in politics should increase political ambition and recruitment. Surprisingly, and contrary to our expectation, this variable is negative and significant for municipal councils, it is positive but not significant for departmental assemblies, and positive and significant for the House of Representatives. This is consistent with previous research on national legislatures. Our results suggest that only in the House of Representatives, as a greater percentage of women get elected in $t-1$, there is a greater average percentage nominated in $t+1$.

Columns 2, 4, and 6 present the results of the fixed effects model on the average percentage of elected women in councils, assemblies, and the House of Representa-

Table 2. Vote Percentage of Nonelected Candidates, 2014 Election

	Senate		House of Representatives	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Mean	0.07	0.03	1.96	1.17
Median	0.02	0.01	0.64	0.34
Standard deviation	0.12	0.08	3.52	2.99

Source: Elaborated by the authors, data by Pachón and Sánchez 2014

tives. In municipal councils, the 2003 and 2011 reforms have a positive and significant effect on the average percentage of elected women, although the substantive effect is small. We observe a similar pattern in the departmental assemblies, in which there is a positive and significant effect of the 1991 Constitution, as well as the 2003 reform. In this case, the gap between female nominated and elected did decrease, but not because a greater percentage were nominated.

Like the models for councils and assemblies, the model for the House of Representatives shows a similar trend of slow change in the percentage of elected women. In fact, the 2011 quota reform dummy is the only one that is significant for explaining the percentage of elected women, with a substantive average effect of 11.07 percent in the house district.

The lagged percentage of elected women explains most of the variation in the proportion of elected women in the assemblies and the house districts, serving as evidence to illustrate how women's participation in these offices is a highly path-dependent process. This is not true for councils, where we find a negative and significant relationship with both the percentage of nominated and elected women.

What explains the persistent gap between nominated and elected women, even with the implementation of the quota? As the literature has discussed, the combination of the quota with the preferential vote, in environments with low female recruiting efforts by the Colombian political parties (*El País* 2011), may pose a difficult situation for women competing in elections. To better describe this situation, table 2 shows an example of the percentage of votes for nonelected members in the 2014 congressional election, differentiated by gender.

As we can observe, failed female candidates received significantly less of the proportion of votes in the district, in both the House and Senate. It would require more election cycles to observe whether the differences between female and male competitors start converging, which would suggest similar recruitment patterns. We also suspect that in addition to the electoral reform limiting the number of lists, the ballot changes that followed in 2006, using numbers instead of pictures or names, made a difference, limiting the information shortcuts voters used to identify their candidates.

Thus, overall, we find evidence to confirm that within the same political system, reforms can have different effect on outcomes contingent on possible, career paths and other currently unobserved variables.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

As the analysis has demonstrated, Colombia's increase in the descriptive representation of women has been slow at the national, regional, and local levels of government. As in other countries in the region, cultural changes associated with a more favorable attitude toward women in positions of power during the second half of the twentieth century did not necessarily translate into female politicians' achieving office during this period. Beginning in the 1990s, a series of changes to the political system, some of which favored the inclusion of women in elected offices, allowed for an improvement in women's descriptive representation. This study has shown that formal institutions played a crucial role by opening the political system to female politicians and creating incentives for political parties to incorporate women, isolating the institutional effect by looking at in-district variation.

The 1991 Constitution opened the political system to new parties, leading to an increase in the proportion of nominated and elected women at certain levels of government. The modification of the ballot structure in 2003, from one in which political parties presented multiple lists of candidates to one having a single, typically open, list per party, also had mixed results when comparing different levels of government. The creation of the 30 percent electoral quota in 2011 had a positive impact on the proportion of nominated women at every level, reinforcing previous findings on the positive effect of quotas in proportional representation systems (Schwindt-Bayer 2009, 2011; Tripp and Kang 2008). The effects of quotas on the average proportion of elected female politicians was positive and significant for both the local councils and the House of Representatives, while it is clearly smaller in size compared to nominations.

Another direction in the study of women's representation in Colombia should be concerned with how the different levels of government relate to each other. Is there a glass ceiling effect as women advance in their political careers? Why is it that assemblies are not affected by institutional reforms while municipal councils are? Due to politicians' progressive ambition, increases in the proportion of elected women at one level of government could have a direct impact on the future participation of women at another level.

Despite the discussed limitations, this study has provided evidence in favor of the importance of the 1991 constitutional reform and gender quotas for reducing barriers for women's recruitment and election in electoral districts in Colombia. As women become more active participants in the political process, over time they are likely to accrue resources and credibility in the eyes of parties and citizens, which might, up to a certain point, counteract the negative effect of the choice of the open-list system, which is unlikely to be changed for some time.

NOTES

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1. This article covers only the period after 1994 because the National Civil Registry Office did not record names of candidates or elected members before this election.

2. Data for the Senate were excluded, as the change in 1991 into a national district left us with only one observation per election, which made the statistical analysis irrelevant and not comparable to the other elections.

3. For each reform, we added a dummy that takes the value of 1 when the reform is enacted and in force, and is equal to 0 in other cases. For example, the 1991 reform is 1 between 1991 and 2002, and 0 after that.

4. We could have used a probit or logit model to observe the impact on the probability of a woman being elected, but since we do not have more individual characteristics, we decided to aggregate the data by district.

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