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Kristin N. Wylie, *Party Institutionalization and Women's Representation in Democratic Brazil*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018. Figures, tables, appendixes, bibliography, index, 290 pp.; hardcover \$99.99, ebook \$80.

Why does Brazil have one of the most vibrant women's movements in the Latin American region and yet comparatively few women elected to the country's legislature? This is the puzzle that Kristin Wylie's book seeks to uncover.

Party Institutionalization and Women's Representation in Democratic Brazil is a quintessential example of a finely crafted political science endeavor. The book is anchored in a robust mixed-methods research design that enables the theory testing of several competing patterns of explanations for the paucity of women in the Brazilian Congress. The analytical inferences, drawn from a massive quantitative database of candidacies to Brazil's legislature and several public opinion surveys, are cross-validated by a large number of interviews with women candidates, members of congress, party officials, and other strategically positioned political actors, as well as participatory observation and qualitative information obtained through the application of questionnaires.

Both this focus on individual-level data—rather than on country-level information—and the inclusion of the actual experience of legislative candidates add refinement to the analysis. While the former is a powerful antidote to the usual problems of ecological fallacy, which befall several works on formal political ambition, the latter follows the fundamental tenet of a “feminist standpoint epistemology” (Doucet and Mauthner 2006, 37), which sees the real-life experiences of women as the necessary point of departure for knowledge production. Also commendable is Wylie's choice to center the quantitative analysis at the subnational level, as candidates to Brazil's lower house (*Câmara dos Deputados*) are elected in states that differ substantially in their institutional features and level of socioeconomic and human

development. After all, political power in this country—as well as in several other nations—is powerfully shaped by these spatial inequalities.

Why does Brazil place low in the ranking of women elected to national legislatures, then? The author shows that the inferences derived from modernization theory are insufficient for explaining why this South American country, despite possessing a gender-based candidate quota, remains with a deficit of women's congressional descriptive representation. The data the author has assembled indicate that women candidates do not necessarily have an enhanced performance in states with a higher development level. Neither do they fare better in states where the *machista* bias—a gender ideology that sees women as less suitable for elected political positions and is associated with more traditional societies—is less salient.

Similarly, system-level features do not seem to be the crucial for solving the puzzle. While part of the literature on political ambition argues that high district magnitudes help improve women's prospects of getting elected, Wylie shows that this is not the case in Brazil, as its accompanying open-list proportional representation system (and other features, such as the previously existing figure of the “birthright candidate”) make the elections in districts with high magnitude hypercompetitive. As a consequence, there is no substantial difference in the electoral performance of women candidates who run in states with a high or low district magnitude.

Interestingly, party ideology was central for Wylie to begin to build the book's core argument. Upon observing Brazil's left-leaning parties, she noticed that, contrary to the expectation of the literature, running on a leftist party slate does not necessarily translate into a larger share of votes for a woman candidate. However, leftist parties possess some features that hold the key to the puzzle. Wylie contends that for women candidates to attain electoral success, two elements must be simultaneously present: a party endowed with both the will and the actual capacity to recruit and train female electoral contenders. These features tend to be present in leftist parties more often than in nonleftist ones.

The central claim of the book, thus, is that party institutionalization enhances women's electoral chances because it engenders parties with clear rules of recruitment and ascension and more intraparty and electoral opportunities for outsiders. Party institutionalization (PII) is a composite measure that gauges the party's internal organization, its societal ties, and its stability. These three elements are measured through the following six variables: age, funds, alternation in the state-level party executive, party membership, presence across each state's municipalities, and state-level electoral volatility. Together they form an index of party institutionalization that varies between 1 and 5. Although the index reveals substantial interparty, as well as state-level intraparty, differences, which are very important to the analysis, Wylie is less consistent when it comes to the threshold for party institutionalization. At first, a score of 3 is needed for a party to be considered institutionalized (99), but then the author mentions an institutionalized party with a score of 2.29 (100) and others with a mean score above 1.9 (148, n. 2).

Despite these small discrepancies, Wylie's argument is very convincing when she shows that institutionalized parties have internal party structures that are open

to the presence of females, hold training courses and activities that equip women to contest elections, and endow their campaigns with resources that enable women to have a real chance at the ballot box. Given their more permeable structure, these institutionalized parties end up having a critical mass of women party leaders—which Wylie defines as at least one-quarter of their executive bodies. This cohort of female leaders is deemed essential to women's overall electoral success, as they become intraparty advocates of the increase of female presence within the party, which, in turn, helps spur additional competitive woman candidacies. The combined effect of party institutionalization and having a critical mass of female leaders is shown to be true empirically, as the author demonstrates that their simultaneous addition to an equation enhances the model fit “by one-third” (140).

Yet Wylie's analysis of the Peruvian case casts doubts on this combined effect. This country ranks much higher than Brazil in the election of women to congress. Interestingly, according to Wylie, Peruvian parties are notorious for their low level of party institutionalization, but (due to a 2003 law) have a substantial number of women in their party executives. From the author's perspective, this female intraparty contingent has been fundamental in “letting the ladder down,” leading, over time, to an increase in the rate of congressional election of females. Wylie's description of this case leads one to wonder whether critical mass is, in fact, the actual crucial variable, as it improves women's electoral performance even in contexts of weakly institutionalized parties.

Regarding the link between inchoate parties and women's congressional presence, the author argues that weakly institutionalized parties do not comply with their own party statutes and consequently lack a clear path of recruitment and ascension within the party—which, needless to say, takes a toll on the electoral chances of outsiders, such as women. Perhaps a different research design, with more emphasis on uncovering informal (rather than formal) rules, would advance this part of the work further. For that, interviews with unsuccessful male candidates and with a larger number of elected congressmen would be needed (the author interviewed only 2 male deputies but more than 70 female counterparts). Those men could perhaps shed light on the most common as well as the most unsuccessful paths to power.

In addition, this issue of the strength, stability, and predictability of informal rules in Brazil's party politics is clear in the case of the elections of a group of females that the author classifies as *supermadres*. Their profile, as epitomized by the case of the female (former) deputy Bel Mesquita, provides clues to somewhat clear guidelines: they suggest that money and family and personal connections are essential for recruitment and ascension within undeveloped parties. Is this valid across the board? Are male candidates also negatively affected by the existing informal rules?

On turning the last page of the book, one is left with an important question. The author brilliantly argues and demonstrates the importance of party institutionalization—both the will and the capacity to recruit women and form competitive female candidacies—for women's success in congressional elections. But who has the agency in this task of increasing party institutionalization? On page 121, the author states that “by developing a clear and universal set of rules for party ascen-

sion. . . , parties can provide women with critical . . . support that will facilitate their successful participation.” Given Brazil’s history of unsuccessful reforms of its political system, that seems like a tall order. If Brazil is to elect more *lutadoras* in the future (women who get elected after having climbed up the party ranks), then agency lies with women themselves—both those with electoral ambition and organized women who refuse to be part of institutional politics but who nonetheless have helped shape public policy rather decisively since the country’s redemocratization.

Simone R Bohn
York University

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