



Online Book Reviews

Thematic Review: Political Institutions and Gender Equality

Gender Quotas in South America's Big Three. By Adriana Piatti-Crocker, Gregory D. Schmidt, and Clara Araújo. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2017. 205 pp. \$90.00 (hardcover), \$85.50 (eBook).

Women, Politics, and Democracy in Latin America. Edited by Tomáš Došek, Flavia Freidenberg, Mariana Caminotti, and Betilde Muñoz-Pogossian. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017. 243 pp. \$129.00 (hardcover), \$99.00 (eBook).

Demanding Justice and Security: Indigenous Women and Legal Pluralities in Latin America. Edited by Rachel Sieder. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2017. 299 pp. \$95.00 (hardcover), \$34.95 (paperback).

Gender and the Politics of Gradual Change: Social Policy Reform and Innovation in Chile. By Silke Staab. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017. 254 pp. \$129.00 (hardcover), \$99.00 (eBook).

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How do political institutions mediate women's access to power, and how do institutions provide opportunities for and obstacles to the reform of public policies that impact women's lives? What specific institutional design is most effective in promoting gender equality, and how does the

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effectiveness of institutional design interact with the larger sociopolitical context in which gender equity advocates pursue change?

These four books take as their starting point the enormous progress that has been made in Latin America in promoting women to elected office and pursuing public policies that promote gender equity. As a result of the struggles of feminist movements, female politicians, and supportive international agencies, gender quota laws are now more widespread in Latin America than in any other region of the world. Argentina was the first Latin American country to institute legislative quotas (in 1991), mandating the placement of women candidates on party electoral lists. Legislative quotas now exist in every Latin American country except Cuba and Guatemala. In a number of countries, such as Peru and Argentina, gender quotas have been instituted at both the national and local levels, and in some, such as Chile, within the political parties themselves. Gender quotas have increased women's representation at multiple levels of government and helped change societal norms about women's roles, setting the stage (one hopes) for greater transformations in the accessibility of political institutions, women's position in those institutions and in public life generally, and public policies that affect their lives. The debate over women's representation in Latin America has moved in many countries from the need for gender quotas to a demand for gender parity in public and appointed offices.

As is often the case with transformative change, the initial optimism over gender quotas has given way to more sober evaluations of the promise and limitations of institutional reform for the advancement of women in public life. Recent research, exemplified by the works reviewed here, addresses the limitations of quotas and other institutional reforms, examining the ways in which the most carefully designed reforms can be undermined and exploring the additional variables — social attitudes, the role of social media, the financing of candidacies, and the informal norms that govern the day-to-day operation of government — that are critical in determining the ultimate effectiveness of institutional reforms. Increasingly, research on gender equality is taking an explicitly intersectional approach (including Sieder 2017, reviewed here), illustrating the ways in which the effectiveness of any reform is mediated by a multitude of identities, including race, ethnicity, class, and sexuality.

Gender Quotas in South America's Big Three, by Adriana Piatti-Crocker, Gregory D. Schmidt, and Clara Araújo, delves in most detail into the specifics of gender quota design, comparing its impact in Argentina, Brazil, and Peru ("South America's big three"). In addition, each case

highlights a broader factor in assessing the impact of quota laws: variations in effectiveness across localities in Peru, the crucial role of campaign finance in Brazil, and the relationship between descriptive and substantive representation in Argentina. *Women, Politics, and Democracy in Latin America*, edited by Tomáš Došek, Flavia Freidenberg, Mariana Caminotti, and Betilde Muñoz-Pogossian, is also primarily concerned with the consequences of quota laws but casts a wider net, using case studies as well as quantitative work and looking at a broad range of mitigating factors, including the role of social media, informal norms of legislative behavior, public opinion on women's roles, and the influence of international organizations.

Demanding Justice and Security, edited by Rachel Sieder, explores attempts by indigenous women, across a range of Latin American countries, to use political institutions to fight for both community and gender justice. Comprising contributions by activists as well as academics, *Demanding Justice and Security*, in contrast to the other works reviewed here, is both explicitly intersectional in focus and self-consciously allied politically with the subjects of its study. Finally, *Gender and the Politics of Gradual Change* analyzes the gendered impact of policy reform in Chile across four distinct policy areas: health care, pensions, child care, and maternity leave. What distinguishes Silke Staab's work among the research reviewed here is her focus on the policy reform process itself, particularly in areas not usually seen as explicitly gendered, such as health care and pensions. While focused on a single country, this work expands our focus beyond those policy areas typically treated by gender equity studies (e.g., gender violence, reproductive rights). Together, these books expand our understanding of the ways that political institutions both mediate access by women (and gender equity advocates in particular) and are, in the best-case scenarios, transformed by women's presence and participation.

Gender Quotas in South America's Big Three tackles the complicated institutional impact of quotas most directly. Focusing on Argentina, Brazil, and Peru, the authors comprehensively evaluate quotas' impact at the national and subnational levels, analyzing how the design of quotas interacts with the larger sociopolitical context to create different effects in different localities.

The authors find that proportional representation (PR) elections, together with mandatory gender quotas in the placement of candidates, are the most effective combination to increase the descriptive representation of women in elected office, but variations in the type of

PR matter greatly. For example, closed-list PR, where candidate ranking is set by the party and voters can only vote for the party as a whole, generally benefits women more than open-list PR, where voters can choose among candidates from the party list. However, “double option preferred vote” (DOPV) open list, as used for congressional elections in Peru, is more effective than standard open-list, as used in Brazil. (In DOPV, voters first vote for a party or alliance, and then they may, in addition, cast one or two votes for their preferred candidates on the list. Seats are awarded to the list that receives the most votes overall, and the seats are filled by the preferred candidates.) Across countries, both party compliance and enforcement vary widely, being considerably higher in Argentina than in Brazil, for instance, which has some of the lowest rates of women winning legislative office in Latin America.

How parties place candidates on lists varies widely across systems. As the authors explain, “Peruvian parties and alliances present a list of candidates equal to the number of seats to be filled in an electoral district, [whereas] in Brazil the number of candidates on each party list may equal 150 percent of the seats to be elected, and coalitions may present lists with 200 percent” (161). Brazilian parties may simply add more women to the party lists, especially in positions less likely to win elections, thereby fundamentally weakening the effectiveness of the quota law. To win office in the Brazilian system, campaign finance thus becomes a critical variable, and the authors find that male candidates receive considerably more campaign contributions, on average, than female candidates.

Looking at provincial- or local-level quota adoption illustrates that quotas do not play out similarly even within countries. To further complicate the search for easy patterns, at the municipal level, Peru uses a mixed system of closed-list PR and majority district elections. How women have fared in local elections has been further impacted by the combined effects of gender, youth, and indigenous quotas. The authors call for further research in this area. In the Argentine provinces, quota adoption happened as a result of different pressures — grassroots organizations were key in some places, whereas quota adoption was institutionally driven in others. To the degree that parity is on the political agenda, it was first discussed at the provincial level in Argentina before those conversations were happening nationally.

In regard to Argentina, the authors also delve into the complicated and controversial topic of whether better descriptive representation of women leads to better substantive representation. They find that women do tend to legislate more progressively on issues of gender equity. However, this

conclusion is disputed by a number of larger studies, including those reviewed by Nélida Archenti and María Inés Tula as well as Jennifer M. Piscopo and Gwynn Thomas (both in Došek et al.).

The variation in the consequences of quotas, even within a given country, makes it difficult to discern obvious patterns: women in Lima have done better than in the provinces, for example, but the opposite is true in Brazil. The same ballot structure has had different impacts at the local level across Peru. But these variations usefully illustrate the broader, emerging consensus: quotas are an extremely important tool for increasing women's descriptive representation to elected office, but their effectiveness varies widely and is impacted by numerous other factors. These additional factors are taken up in greater detail in Došek et al.

Women, Politics and Democracy in Latin America concurs with Piatti-Crocker, Schmidt, and Araújo and the broader literature on the importance of "robust" quota design: "large district magnitudes, closed candidate lists with clear placement mandates, and the absence of escape valves that limit the proper enforcement law" (217) is the best combination of factors that help ensure an increase in women's descriptive representation. However, the authors in this wide-ranging volume call for a broad set of "complementary measures" that will support women who are elected to office and increase their influence over policy making. The contributing authors focus on a host of factors influencing the election and political advancement of women beyond the imposition of quotas, including social attitudes and public opinion, social media, campaign finance laws, and the role of national and international actors (3).

For example, Mona Lena Krook outlines a series of strategies necessary to bolster the effectiveness of quotas, specifically measures to protect women from political violence (which can be part of the backlash against women's advancement), as well as institutional support for women legislators, including the transformation of informal norms to allow for better work-family balance (such as meeting times). Echoing conclusions from Piatti-Crocker, Schmidt, and Araújo, Krook argues that better financing for women candidates is a critical factor, and one that some countries are beginning to address. In Brazil, parties receive public funding to facilitate women candidates' access to mass media. In Costa Rica, both men and women receive public funding for training in "democratic values" of gender equality, human rights, and women's empowerment (224).

Cases from Costa Rica and Mexico show that electoral authorities must be committed to the proper implementation of quotas, and María del

Carmen Alanís Figueroa notes the importance of judges ruling “with a gender perspective” to ensure that the quota law in Mexico is properly applied (156). (The role of the Mexican courts is also a focus of the chapter by María Theresa Sierra in Sieder’s volume.) Malu A. C. Gatto looks at 40 quota laws in Latin America (1991–2015) and concludes that institutional diffusion or contagion is not enough; women’s presence and mobilization are required to make quota laws work in practice. Ana Laura Rodríguez Gustá and Nancy Madera likewise emphasize the importance of constructing advocacy networks among politicians, community activists, nongovernmental organizations, and international organizations (such as the Organization of American States, United Nations Development Programme, Inter-American Court on Human Rights, and UN Women) to push for women’s empowerment and gender equity policies at all levels of government.

Chapters by Nélide Archenti and María Inés Tula and Jennifer M. Piscopo and Gwynn Thomas contest the assumption that women legislators necessarily represent women’s interests, and the volume concludes that “women’s descriptive representation does not guarantee a full advancement of a substantive gender agenda” (218). As discussed in *Gender Quotas in South America’s Big Three*, the editors concur that in Argentina, the increase in women’s descriptive representation resulted in substantive policy changes. However, a review of the larger literature illustrates that women do not necessarily promote gender equity in office; women’s policy preferences are shaped by party, ideology, and class, as well as gender. (In systems in which women struggle for campaign financing, one could also argue that their preferences are shaped by their donors.)

The editors conclude that “[g]iven the complex nature of these obstacles, the required solutions are not only institutional; they must be multidimensional and multisector, touching on aspects such as discriminatory informal rules and gender stereotypes that are embedded in society, political parties, and the state” (222). They offer a number of possible solutions toward this end. Quotas should be extended to leadership positions, and gender parity should be enforced within political parties. Recruitment, training, and support of women candidates, including financing, is critical. Support networks are necessary but difficult to maintain because of competition among women for office. Greater oversight and sanctions are needed to ensure compliance with quota laws and gender equity regulations and to limit violent backlash against elected women. Changes in scheduling and the

location of decision-making are necessary to help women balance work and family (“family reconciliation practices”). More broadly, education that addresses attitudes and perceptions about women in power will facilitate the entrance of more women into politics. As discussed later, obstacles to women’s empowerment represent much greater challenges for indigenous women, particularly in regions of Latin America beset by violence.

Demanding Justice and Security examines the efforts of indigenous women in Latin America to use legal institutions and processes, including community justice systems, constitutions, and national and international courts, to advance gender and community equity claims. Featuring case studies of Bolivia, Colombia, Guatemala, Ecuador, and Mexico and focusing on the national and local levels, the authors emphasize the contextual nature of equity claims and their specific historical meaning, as well as the ways in which those meanings are bound by and also transcend specific cultural, temporal, and political contexts. This work stands apart from the other books reviewed here both in methodology and subject matter. It is the most anthropological in approach and the most purposefully allied with the women whose struggles it chronicles. A number of the authors are activists working in the communities that are the focus of their research and consciously strive to make the research collaborative and contributive toward the larger goals of justice, security, and gender equity in these communities.

In focusing on indigenous women, *Demanding Justice and Security* also brings into focus communities often overlooked in much of the research on political institutions, particularly in political science. An important contribution of this work is its emphasis on intersectionality: the ways that indigenous women negotiate multiple identities of class, gender, and ethnicity and their struggles to balance gender and ethnic claims. This is a complex endeavor: the indigenous women chronicled in these chapters simultaneously try to advance the rights of their people (to land, to equal rights, and to freedom from violence, militarization, and the impact of neoliberal economics and extractive industries) and their rights as women. They push for gender equity nationally while also advocating for it within their communities. For example, Emma Cervone and Cristina Cucur’s case study of Chimborazo, Ecuador, details the efforts of Kichwa women to include protections from gender violence within the provisions for indigenous rights in the 2008 constitution. A number of the authors focus on the efforts of indigenous women from various communities to try to repurpose indigenous understandings of

community and justice to advance their claims in the larger political system while still contesting the ways that these same terms (such as reciprocity and complementarity) have been used to enforce patriarchal authority within their communities. Arteaga Böhr, for instance, examines the ways that Aymara women in Bolivia have challenged their community's use of the indigenous concept of "complementarity" to resist women's equality.

Another distinguishing feature of this collection concerns the larger context in which these struggles for justice take place. All of these case studies focus on societies with ongoing violence and militarization (for example, María Teresa Sierra's chapter on Me'phaa women in Guerrero, Mexico, using the Inter-American Court of Human Rights to protest military violence in their home state). In this sense, the work represents a complement to the larger literature on women in conflict and postconflict societies and a useful corrective to much of the work on political institutions in Latin America, most of which is firmly situated in stable, post-transition societies. Pursuing gender equity and community justice in the context of drug violence, paramilitary and military violence, and the violence surrounding extractive industries carries fundamentally different challenges and risks and requires different political strategies.

However, one important area of overlap with the other work reviewed here concerns the ways that privatization and decentralization of government services constrain the opportunities women have to pursue gender equity through political institutions. In her chapter on Maya-K'iche' women's attempts in the municipal women's council in Chichicastenango, Guatemala, to protect themselves from militarized violence, Sieder concludes that these women's efforts "[point] to the ways in which neoliberal agendas for decentralized governance shape the prospects for women's organizational autonomy and definitions of gender discrimination and harm" (4).

Gender and the Politics of Gradual Change draws what may seem a pessimistic (and controversial) conclusion: that in many cases, because of institutional legacies and the privatization of public services, radical policy reform is impossible. Through an analysis of four policy reform episodes in Chile (the 2002 health reform, the 2008 pension reform, the expansion of child care services in 2006–2010, and the 2011 reform of maternity leave), Staab argues that "all or nothing" political approaches are unlikely to succeed (210). Positive gender change is possible, but it is contingent on the strategies of political actors and the rigidity of the institutional structure in place in a given policy sector. She argues,

however, that piecemeal, gradual changes can set the stage for more transformative reform down the road.

A particularly important contribution of Staab's work lies in her examination of policy areas like health care and pensions that most policy makers do not consider "gender issues." Policy reforms in these areas have profoundly gendered impacts, especially when market forces are prioritized in the reform process. For example, Staab writes that women are "disproportionately affected by health sector commodification," and without a clear gender focus, social policy "may redistribute resources between socioeconomic groups but still fail to address important gender inequalities" (9). Furthermore, when a policy area is not viewed as gendered, advocates of gender equity will struggle to gain access to the policy-making process. Staab writes that, even as the Chilean Women's Ministry gained in stature and budget within the government, it was largely marginalized from the health care and pension reform processes. Finally, while outside mobilization by feminist groups has impacted policy formation in other areas, such as gender violence, in most cases the policy-making process was well insulated from outside advocates, relying more on "the politics of agreement and expertise" (199).

As a result, reforms were, in effect, layered onto the existing institutional structure in a given policy sector. Staab concludes that the health care and pension reforms did provide new entitlements and benefits for women, but these "were layered onto the margins of the unmodified institutional core of privatized or dual systems" (192). In child care, new measures helped enable mothers to join the workforce but did little to address deeper gendered assumptions around child care. The maternity leave reform established important new entitlements for women but "largely maintained the maternalist thrust of the pre-existing policy framework" (192). Staab argues that gender inequities remain in each of these policy areas and that improvements are "nested within broader contextual continuities" (192). The first three policy reforms took place during the Socialist governments of Ricardo Lagos (2000–2006) and Michelle Bachelet (2006–2010, 2014–2018), when a push for progressive reforms would be more expected. Staab's analysis of maternity leave reform is particularly intriguing because it was the most far-reaching reform but, in contrast to the others, took place under the conservative Sebastian Piñera government (2010–2014, 2018–present) at a time when other progressive reforms from the Bachelet administration were being rolled back. The marginalization of gender equity advocates during these

policy reforms points to the importance of women gaining access to leadership roles within the legislature and bureaucracy, such as appointment to influential committees and positions of authority within executive ministries.

Each of these books echoes the main conclusion of Došek et al.: “[D]espite significant progress, gender inequalities have not been completely overcome. Women continue to face various obstacles in politics, the removal of which requires dedicated strategies” (216). The research reviewed here examines, through a variety of lenses and methodologies, the opportunities and limitations of pursuing gender equality through political institutions. There are significant areas of overlap, reflecting the growing consensus that political institutions represent a critical site for gender reforms, by increasing women’s access to political power and their influence over policy making. There is increasing recognition by academics and practitioners of the importance of quota design, as well as the need for oversight to ensure the proper functioning of quotas once in place. The research reviewed here expands our understanding of not only the technical specifics of optimal quota design but also the myriad additional factors required for women to benefit from these institutional reforms. Addressing the gendered inequalities embedded in the larger sociopolitical context requires addressing formal laws and regulations such as campaign finance laws, informal norms that shape government decision-making dynamics in ways that complicate work-family balance, and broader biases in education and the media that promote negative gender stereotypes. More broadly, the relative weight of market forces within policy sectors will determine the extent to which women in government can pursue reform on particular issues. The larger global context is also key, as international organizations and institutions may play a powerful role in pressuring domestic governments to prioritize issues of gender equity. Finally, an intersectional research methodology critically reminds us that each of these factors, and any policy reforms, will have differing impacts on women of different socioeconomic classes, ethnicities, or sexualities. In sum, each of these four recent examinations of political institutions and gender equality breaks new theoretical and empirical ground, and they point the way to needed areas of future research.

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