

Book Review

Schwindt-Bayer, Leslie A. (2010). *Political Power and Women's Representation in Latin America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 272 pp., \$65.00, ISBN 978-0-199-73195-4.

Since the widespread transition to democracy swept Latin America in the 1980s, women have acquired a new political status in most countries of the region. The number of women elected to political offices has increased considerably in most countries, albeit at varying rates. In this book, Leslie Schwindt-Bayer explores not only the rise in the number of women elected in Latin America but also the impact this increase has on the policymaking process and on perceptions of democracy in the region. Focusing on the national legislative bodies of Latin American countries, *Political Power and Women's Representation in Latin America* is an ambitious work that explores all aspects of women's representation in the region.

This book is a great addition to the women's representation literature in two specific ways. First, a comprehensive look at Latin America was long overdue. As the author explains, the great bulk of research on women's representation has been focused on industrialized countries. Latin America has seen major socioeconomic and political changes since the 1980s, and a work exploring women's representation and its impact on the democratic institutions in the region was needed. Second, this book offers important theoretical contributions to the discussion of women's representation. Using Hannah Pitkin's (1967) seminal conceptualization of political representation as a starting point, Schwindt-Bayer provides a fresh interpretation to how the four dimensions of representation—formal, descriptive, substantive, and symbolic—interact to influence women's representation and policymaking in Latin America. While most authors look at the four dimensions of representation separately, Schwindt-Bayer explores how these dimensions influence one another and how the dynamic process among the dimensions can have a direct impact on women's representation.

When looking at the dimensions of representation, the author argues that they relate to one another in three ways. First, she explores the way formal representation influences descriptive representation. Chapter 2 expands on this idea by exploring the factors influencing the election of women to national legislatures in Latin America. Using data from all Latin American countries for national elections between 1974 and 2006, the author concludes

that formal representation, in the form of electoral rules and gender quotas, is directly linked to the descriptive representation of women. The results support previous research on the influence of electoral rules and quotas in electing women, while also expanding our knowledge on how the dynamic between different electoral institutions can influence women's descriptive representation. In regards to quota laws, the author argues that "differences in the design of gender quotas and the electoral context in which they are implemented affect representation of women in countries with quotas" (60). This argument is especially important in the discussion of quotas for women and other minorities. It moves the discussion away from a strict view of quota design toward a dynamic view of how a number of factors, including the influence of other electoral rules, determine the success or failure of quotas in each country.

The second way the dimensions of representation relate to one another is through the impact that formal and descriptive representation have on substantive representation. Chapters 3 through 5 explore these relationships by looking at political attitudes and policymaking in three Latin American countries: Argentina, Colombia, and Costa Rica. Chapter 3 uses survey data from legislators in these three countries to explore the differences in political preferences between male and female politicians. The two most important conclusions about political preferences are that women place a higher priority on women's issues and that they share similar ideas across the three countries. But do favorable attitudes toward women's issues translate into policies?

Chapters 4 and 5 explore policymaking and women leadership to determine the impact of descriptive representation on substantive representation. Using data on bill sponsorship and cosponsorship, complemented by survey data on committee debates, Schwindt-Bayer argues that, in general, women's descriptive representation is increasing women's substantive representation. She contends that "women are not only placing higher priority on women's issues on their political preferences, but they are bringing forth important women's rights policies" (102). In other words, increasing the number of women in legislative bodies in Latin America can lead to more gender-related policymaking. However, "women representing women" can have a negative effect since women legislators may be marginalized from other important policymaking areas. Using data on committee membership and leadership in these three countries, and comparing between the pre-quota and post-quota periods, the author concludes that women are not representing non-women-specific constituencies at the same level as men. Moreover, she finds that, in the case of Argentina's party-centered system, quotas may have had a negative impact on the assignment of women to committee leadership positions. These two chapters provide a sophisticated look into the policymaking process in the three countries studied. After reading these chapters, the reader will have some interesting questions about the relationships among formal, descriptive, and substantial representation in Latin America.

The third way the dimensions of representation interact relates to the electorate's views on government. Chapter 7 explores how formal, descriptive, and substantive representation influence symbolic representation. The author argues that "women's representation is a symbol of the inclusiveness of the political system and sends signals to citizens that can generate positive feelings about elected government" (155). Utilizing data from the 2006 Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) survey and combining it with measures of women's representation, this chapter seeks to understand whether citizens' attitudes toward the government are influenced by women's representation. Using democratic satisfaction, perceptions of corruption, and trust in the legislature as measures of citizen attitudes, the author argues that the three dimensions of representation partially explain citizens' attitudes toward the government. However, the connection between gender and positive attitudes toward the government is problematic, as the measurements of representation are not part of the survey questions and citizens are not necessarily aware of the factors related to women's representation and gender-related policymaking used in the analysis. Nevertheless, Schwindt-Bayer's effort to measure the impact of gender on citizens' attitudes must be taken in consideration and, as the author recommends, a longitudinal study could provide stronger evidence that the election of women to national legislatures in Latin America leads to increased positive attitudes toward government.

As the study of women's representation continues to advance, Schwindt-Bayer's book provides a great starting point for students and scholars wanting to better understand the phenomenon in Latin American democracies. Methodologically, this book provides a sophisticated example of the mixed-methods approach. The author successfully combines complex statistical models, survey analyses, and interviews. She creates a superb narrative of the dynamic relationship between the dimensions of representation. But it is the theory developed by the author that makes this book a must-read for scholars involved in the study of women's representation and gender-related policymaking. By exploring the relationship between Pitkin's four dimensions of representation, Schwindt-Bayer provides a solid, new approach to understanding what women's representation truly means. This book goes beyond static explanations of how women get elected and who represents women in a political system. It moves the debate toward a dynamic approach to how political institutions and elected women influence policymaking and how these factors influence citizens' attitudes toward government institutions.

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