

Book Reviews

Schwindt-Bayer, Leslie A. (2010) *Political Power and Women's Representation in Latin America*, Oxford University Press (Oxford), 262 pp. £40.00 hbk.

This book gives us an interesting analysis of women legislators that explores the links between different types of representation. Schwindt-Bayer tests the relationship between female legislative behaviour and electoral rules in Latin America. To do this she uses Hannah Pitkin's conceptual framework but in the form of an integrated theory of women's representation that does not separate descriptive from substantive representation (as many gender and politics scholars do currently). Latin America forms the basis of her empirical analysis for a number of reasons. First, because of the increased number of women legislators seen all over the continent in recent years; second because of the high incidence of electoral quotas for women; and finally because Latin America has often been overlooked in much of the literature on women's representation, which has tended to focus predominantly on the First World. Schwindt-Bayer uses four legislatures in three countries – Argentina, Colombia (two) and Costa Rica – as in-depth case-studies. They were chosen on a most similar and most different basis. They are similar in terms of their background, culture and history but vary in their electoral rules. Argentina, for example, is widely known as one of the earliest adopters of electoral quotas for women (the legislation was passed in 1991), Costa Rica employed them from 1998 and Colombia did not have quotas during the period of the study. She uses a range of methods to conduct her research – both quantitative and qualitative – combining both statistical analysis with in-depth elite interviews.

Schwindt-Bayer explores various aspects of the relationship between female legislators and electoral rules. Examining data from 18 countries she first finds that quotas and electoral rules do make a difference. The majority of the book is then focused

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on issues that most scholars would categorise as women's substantive representation. It looks closely at the attitudes of legislators in Schwindt-Bayer's case-study countries and finds that male and female legislators do exhibit different attitudes, particularly in relation to women's equality issues, which perhaps unsurprisingly are given a far higher priority by women legislators. The book goes on to examine policy-making and bill sponsorship. Again the data show that women tend to sponsor more bills on equality issues. Schwindt-Bayer subsequently analyses gender and positions of power in legislators focusing on the leadership of committees. She finds, in keeping with much other literature on gender and political representation, that women legislators are more likely to be on 'women's committees' dealing with welfare, women's, children's and equality issues rather than on 'men's committees' dealing with economic issues and finance. Women are also under-represented as leaders of the Chamber and as committee chairs. The final sections of the book deal with two other themes. First, she looks at what Schwindt-Bayer calls homestyle issues – by which she means work within the legislator's district often to garner votes in which women do more to promote women within their districts; and, second, at the symbolic representation of women in terms of their democratic satisfaction. An analysis of data from 14 countries shows that women tend to be more satisfied with democracy than men.

This book gives us some very important and informative in-depth research of some of the key issues surrounding women's representation. It goes beyond the analysis of the impact of electoral laws on women's descriptive representation to analyse some of the important questions that are currently engaging gender and politics scholars. It is therefore a useful addition to the literature, but there are some questions about the nature of the analysis and findings. Schwindt-Bayer uses a very undifferentiated notion of gender, seeing women and women's interests as relatively homogeneous, paying little attention to differences that arise because of class, race and sexuality. It would have increased the explanatory purchase of her analysis if notions of intersectionality had been incorporated into her framework. I found that there was a big focus on actors – both men and women – there could have been more discussion of the nature of the institutions – their rules, norms and practices. And finally while an in-depth study of three countries is obviously very valuable, it is not possible to generalise too broadly from the findings. Indeed, some area specialists may find the use of concepts and frameworks derived from the analysis of the First World and particularly the United States somewhat off-putting. But overall this study is a very valuable addition to the scholarship on women and politics in Latin America. It takes forward some of the key questions and puzzles that are currently preoccupying gender and politics scholars, and will be useful to students and scholars in political science and Latin American Studies.

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