Book Review: Political Power and Women's Representation in Latin America
Angela Ju
Comparative Political Studies 2011 44: 1704
DOI: 10.1177/0010414011407728

The online version of this article can be found at:
http://cps.sagepub.com/content/44/12/1704

Additional services and information for Comparative Political Studies can be found at:

Email Alerts: http://cps.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts
Subscriptions: http://cps.sagepub.com/subscriptions
Reprints: http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav
Permissions: http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav
Citations: http://cps.sagepub.com/content/44/12/1704.refs.html

>> Version of Record - Nov 15, 2011
What is This?

**Reviewed by:** Angela Ju, *University of California, Los Angeles, Los Angeles, CA, USA*

DOI: 10.1177/0010414011407728

Although scholarship on women and representation has generally turned to cases in North America or Western Europe, Leslie Schwindt-Bayer’s theoretically and methodologically rigorous, thoroughly researched, and well-written book offers scholars of comparative politics insight into another region that is representative of many other democratic regions. Today, all Latin American countries, except for Cuba, are electoral democracies. Although still influenced by a culture of *machismo*, Latin America has seen women increasingly enter into the public sphere, the workforce, and institutions of higher education. The region has received much international attention in the past 20 years for the election of women to the presidency in Nicaragua, Panama, Chile, and Argentina. These factors all increase the generalizability of the book’s findings.

The primary research questions that Schwindt-Bayer poses are the following: “Why has women’s access to politics increased in Latin America, and why does it vary so widely across countries? How does having women in office affect politics? And what are the consequences of women’s representation in politics for representative democracy?” (p. 4). In answering this set of questions, Schwindt-Bayer turns to political theorist Hanna Pitkin’s (1967) four interrelated dimensions of political representation—formal, descriptive, substantive, and symbolic representation—and defines and operationalizes these four dimensions in the context of democratically elected legislatures. Formal representation refers to institutional electoral rules. Descriptive representation refers to the extent to which the diversity of the national population is reflected in the national legislature. Substantive representation refers to how legislators act for their constituents and to policy responsiveness, which is what legislators do exactly to address the concerns of their constituents. Lastly, symbolic representation refers to representation as a symbol that generates emotional responses about politics or government among constituents. Although most studies on gender and representation usually address only one or two of the four dimensions, Schwindt-Bayer holistically addresses all four dimensions in this book and demonstrates how they are conceptually linked to one another. She uses empirical measurements of these four dimensions to test a number of hypotheses about how formal representation affects descriptive representation, how formal and descriptive representation affect substantive representation,
and how formal, descriptive, and substantive representation affect symbolic representation.

Her exemplary three-case research design approximates Mill’s method of difference or a most similar systems design (Przeworski & Teune, 1970) in which culture and socioeconomic indices of differences between male and female life expectancy, literacy, income, shares of parliamentary seats, and shares of highly skilled positions in the workforce across Argentina, Colombia, and Costa Rica are near constants. Electoral rules are what vary. Although Argentina has had gender quotas since 1991 and has a closed-list proportional representation (party-centered) electoral system, Colombia does not have gender quotas and has an open-list proportional representation (personalistic) electoral system. Adding Costa Rica as a case study allows Schwindt-Bayer to determine which types of electoral rules (formal representation) explain differences in substantive representation because Costa Rica also has a closed-list proportional representation electoral system and has used quotas only since 1998. This allows the author to make use of time-serial data in Costa Rica to examine pre- and postquota periods and to isolate the effect of quotas from the effect of closed-list proportional representation electoral rules.

Schwindt-Bayer begins her empirical tests by evaluating the link between formal representation and descriptive representation. Using electoral data from 18 Latin American democracies, the author demonstrates that formal representation is a key explanatory factor for women’s descriptive representation in Latin American legislatures. Higher district magnitudes, higher party magnitudes, and gender quotas lead to the election of more women. Furthermore, gender quota designs that require a higher percentage of women on the ballot, that have placement mandates, and that have strong enforcement mechanisms yield greater numbers of women in office than weak gender quota designs.

Next, using a survey that she conducted of legislators in Argentina, Colombia, and Costa Rica dealing with political preferences, backgrounds, previous experiences, and political ambition, Schwindt-Bayer finds that descriptive representation of women leads to more substantive representation of women in terms of the political preferences that representatives bring to the legislature. Female legislators view women’s equality issues as more important than do male legislators and hold similar political preferences to their female constituents.

It is in the three chapters that deal with legislative behavior in office where I believe that Schwindt-Bayer makes her most innovative empirical evaluations of Pitkin’s conception of representation. Her notions of substantive representation in these chapters go beyond women’s political preferences as she
demonstrates how women are still being substantively marginalized within the legislatures despite gains in descriptive representation. It is Schwindt-Bayer’s analysis of the substantive dimension, the dimension which Pitkin (1967) found most difficult to address, in these three chapters that her methodological creativity is most apparent. The author’s sources of evidence in these chapters include her survey of legislators in Argentina, Colombia, and Costa Rica, in-depth interviews with female legislators in the three countries, information on bill sponsorship and cosponsorship for 7,000 legislative bills, committee and floor debates of bills, committee assignments, leadership post assignments, and constituency service.

In these chapters, she finds that female legislators in the three countries are more likely than male ones to sponsor and cosponsor women’s issue bills, such as bills on gender quotas in legislative elections and on domestic violence protection for women. Many of these bills would not have been introduced or passed without the descriptive representation of these women legislators. Evidence of gendered legislative environments include the fact that women are less likely than men to sponsor or cosponsor bills on particularly prestigious issues such as economics or foreign affairs despite having similar issue preferences to men on these issues. Schwindt-Bayer also finds that despite having similar interests as male legislators, female legislators are not representing non-women-specific constituencies as much as male legislators. Women are underrepresented in chamber leadership, sometimes overrepresented in women’s domain committees and underrepresented on men’s domain committees, and kept out of the top leadership post in men’s domain committees. Argentina and Costa Rica, which have party-centered systems, have greater marginalization of women than Colombia, which has a personalistic system. In Argentina, gender quotas seem to have made marginalization of women in committee assignments worse. In the three countries, there have not been many changes in leadership and committee assignments of women after the adoption of quotas. Schwindt-Bayer, however, finds less evidence of marginalization of women in constituency service. Female legislators use constituency service as much as their male counterparts to allocate resources, present themselves, and explain their legislative activities to their district constituents. The differences that do exist between female and male legislators in constituency service often deal with female legislators’ more active role in representing women, women’s groups, and women’s issues.

Although these three chapters dealing with substantive representation draw my highest praise, they also draw my primary critiques of the book. One element that I believe would have added to Schwindt-Bayer’s already rigorous research design in these chapters is the inclusion of in-depth
interviews with male legislators. This source of evidence may have helped the author to evaluate some of her speculations about male marginalization of women in certain legislative task assignments. More broadly, interviews with male legislators would have given Schwindt-Bayer a reference point for comparison. Also, from these chapters, readers get a sense that Schwindt-Bayer’s notion of political power involves gender equality or lack of marginalization of female legislators by male legislators in committee assignments and leadership positions. Yet the concept of political power is nowhere near as well defined or as developed as the concept of representation in this book, even though the title of the book is *Political Power and Women’s Representation in Latin America*. These critiques, however, do not detract from the overall quality of the book.

Finally, in evaluating symbolic representation, Schwindt-Bayer uses both respondent-level data and country-level data of 14 Latin American democracies. She finds evidence that formal, descriptive, and substantive representation relate to symbolic representation. Electoral disproportionality (formal representation) weakens democratic satisfaction, legislative trust, and government trust. It also leads to citizens viewing their governments as more corrupt than citizens in countries with more proportional electoral rules. Passage of women’s issue policies (substantive representation) leads to citizens having lower perceptions of corruption in government and higher levels of democratic satisfaction, legislative trust, and government trust. Descriptive representation, although having no significant effects on perceptions of corruption or government trust, increases satisfaction with democracy and legislative trust.

In conclusion, Schwindt-Bayer’s engagement of an integrated model of representation that relies on empirical indicators and measurements of Pitkin’s four dimensions of political representation serves as an exemplary research design for the study of women’s representation in legislatures in other cases. *Political Power and Women’s Representation in Latin America* also offers several further avenues of research, some explicitly stated by the author, for students of gender politics in Latin America, gender and political representation, and comparative legislative studies. One example that the author explicitly provides is a longitudinal study of whether improvement in women’s descriptive representation increases affect toward government over time.

I believe that Schwindt-Bayer’s integrated model of representation could also be applied to studies of representation for other social categories such as race or ethnicity. Likewise, future research could address the representation of the diverse interests of women of various racial, ethnic, and other social categories. After all, Pitkin (1967) argued that it is actually where there are competing
interests and a need for bargaining and compromise that substantive representation is most relevant. Schwindt-Bayer’s praiseworthy treatment of this dimension of representation in this book provides authors of future studies a springboard for evaluating the diverse interests that constitute women’s representation as a whole.

References


Reviewed by: Matthew D. Fails, Oakland University, Rochester, MI, USA
DOI: 10.1177/0010414011407729

Among recent African political leaders, Uganda’s Yoweri Museveni has been heralded as an example for the rest of continent, ushering in multiparty elections, adopting a host of market-driven reforms that coincided with economic growth, and aggressively tackling HIV/AIDS. Yet Museveni has also retained an iron grip on political power since ousting Milton Obote a quarter century ago, winning presidential elections in 1996, 2001, and 2006, winning presidential elections in 1996, 2001, 2006, and 2011. Respect for human rights in Uganda has recently declined, with increased repression against political rivals and draconian criminal punishments for homosexuals. Gone too are the days of Uganda’s continent-leading free press.

For Aili Mari Tripp, these contradictions cannot be easily attributed to the personalities involved or the nuances of Ugandan political history. Instead, they represent a core feature of Africa’s dominant type of political systems—hybrid systems caught between the authoritarian regimes of the late twentieth century and their liberal democratic alternative. In Museveni’s Uganda: Paradoxes of Power in a Hybrid Regime, Tripp demonstrates that such regimes operate under a specific political logic that explains their contradictory nature and stubborn persistence.

Tripp’s work is a reaction against the prevailing trend of focusing scholarly attention on Africa’s democratic experiments and cases of successful