

Gender Quotas and The Level of Citizenship of Women in Mexico

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Abstract. The United Mexican States, or Mexico, has been focusing on democratic reforms in the past few decades. One of the most notable among these is the gender quota policy that mandates a certain percentage of legislative seats be reserved for women. Focusing on this topic, the question asked in this paper is the effects of the gender quota — its implementation and evolution, specifically—on the citizenship of women in Mexico. This research is important, as it provides crucial support for the debate surrounding affirmative action policies, as well as democratization in general. In this paper, data is collected from Our World in Data and UNDP Human Development Reports, then calculated and drawn into graphs in Microsoft Excel. The conclusion of the data analysis is that, despite the quota not being met except for the 2021 election, the citizenship of Mexican women still improved with every reformation and reinforcement of the gender quota law. This suggests that, despite not being properly regulated, the existence of a quota and affirmative action policies in general provide benefits for the minority they are designed to protect.

Keywords: gender quota; Mexico; representation; citizenship.

1. Introduction

The United Mexican States, more commonly known as Mexico, has experienced political turmoil and economic reforms in the past century [1]. Since undertaking structural adjustment programs, the federal government is progressing in consolidating its democratic institutions [2]. One manifestation of democratic values in Mexico—and many other Latin American countries—is the implementation of gender quotas in parliament [3]. Mexico's legal minimum of female candidates in its Mixed-member Proportional Representation (MMP) electoral system intrigues the author in investigating how it changes Mexican society, specifically the female population's level of citizenship. In the expectation of women's substantive representation (WSR), more women elected to the legislature will promote female interest [4]. This paper explores whether this applies to Mexico during the time frame from 1996, the year Congress passed the first weak gender quota, to 2021, the most recent election. The importance of this research is its contribution to the debate surrounding affirmative action policies, as it analyzes the effects of a real-life case study.

The research question is as follows: how will the adoption, enforcement, and diffusion of gender quotas in Mexico affect the level of citizenship — measured through three aspects: health, education, and economic capability/labor force participation — of women?

The corresponding hypothesis is that, as the number, quality, reforms and reinforcement of gender quota increases, so does the level of citizenship of women between the time frame 1996 – 2021.

2. Background

2.1. Definition of Key Terms

In this paper, there shall be regular occurrences of these key terms: Mixed-Member Proportional Representation (MMP), Partido Acción Nacional/ National Action Party (PAN), Partido de la Revolución Democrática/ Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), Partido Revolucionario Institucional/ Institutional Revolution Party (PRI), Suplentes, and Women's substantive representation (WSR). Table 1 specifies the definition and the relevant contextual knowledge for these terms.

Table 1. Key Terms

Term and Abbreviation	Definition
Mixed-Member Proportional Representation (MMP)	A mixed electoral system in which each voter has two votes, one party list vote and one single-member district plurality vote. The parties are awarded with parliament seats proportional to their percentage of votes (if they get more than 5% of total votes), with priority given to candidates who won their district election. If the party gets less than 5% of party votes, but wins at least one electorate seat, they are still entitled to their share of seats in parliament [5].
Partido Acción Nacional/ National Action Party (PAN)	Founded in 1939, the conservative PAN is one of the main three political parties in Mexico [6].
Partido de la Revolución Democrática/ Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD)	Another Mexican mainstream political party, the PRD is the most left-wing of the three. In terms of the topic of this essay, it was the first political party to lobby for the gender quota [6].
Partido Revolucionario Institucional/ Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI)	The PRI held power in Mexico uninterrupted for 71 years in history, before it was replaced by PAN. In the status quo, the PRI is centre left in political ideology [7].
Suplentes	By Mexican law, the ballot specifies an alternate for each titular candidate (propietario) in single-member districts and on electoral lists who will take office in the event the propietario dies or resigns [8].
Women's substantive representation (WSR)	Feminist political theory divides female representation into two separate categories. The first is descriptive representation or having more women representatives. The second is substantive representation, which focuses on representing women's issues, interests, needs and wants [9].

2.2. Evolution History of Mexican Gender Quota Laws

In the early 1990s, female leaders in the PRD pressured for political inclusion and representation within the party. Their efforts did not go to waste, as the PRD, in 1993, officially implemented a candidate gender quota of 20% for congressional candidates; this number was later raised to 30%. However, it was immediately clear that the law had no real weight, since the quota wasn't followed during the following 1994 elections. Starting in the mid-1990s, similar debates about female inclusion were occurring in the PRI and the PAN, mirroring the previous PRD ones. In 1996, the ruling PRI adopted a quota of 30% on electoral lists and on territorial committees. In the same year, the national congress approved a weak and largely rhetorical quota law - it permitted parties to comply by including them as suplentes on party lists, with no specific penalties for noncompliance. In the late 1990s, female members of the PRD lobbied to increase their party's quota to 50%. This proposal narrowly lost at the 2001 party congress. In 2002 and 2008, enforcement mechanisms were strengthened, and the federal quota was raised from 30% to 40%, respectively [3]. In 2009, many women who were elected to the Chamber of Deputies resigned and gave up their seats to men as an act of protest in an infamous scandal [10]. As a result of the abovementioned scandal, a judicial decision after the 2011/2012 election that made it clear that the entire ticket had to be women for it to count as part of the quota. In 2014, the most recent change was passed: A constitutional amendment raised the quota to 50% in order to ensure gender parity, and also expanded the reach of the quota from just the federal level to also the state level [3].

Mexico has no doubt come a long way in the fight for female inclusion and representation in government. It is crucial to note that, since the birth of the gender quota, in no election cycle was the mandated percentage actually met, with the sole exception of 2021, which is the most recent election. Thus, there is a large gap between the quota laws and the actual implementation, a loophole that is taken into consideration in the discussion and conclusion of this paper.

2.3. Literature Review

The existence of gender quotas in Mexico, and Latin America more broadly, is a popular discussion in scholarship, as it is not a common requirement in other parts of the globe. For the purposes of this essay, two core pieces of literature concerning Mexican gender quotas are discussed, as well as a fundamental work in political science that defines and explains the concept of citizenship.

The first piece of literature is *States as Gender Equality Activists: The Evolution of Quota Laws in Latin America* by Jennifer M. Piscopo. The paper examines the implementation of gender quotas in several Latin American countries. It argues that, due to international and domestic pressure, governments have sought means to increase women's participation in politics to ensure their natural rights, and states, including Mexico, have upheld gender parity goals. Through the adoption of gender quotas, women have gained more representation. Closely linked, more representation of women in the government leads to women's expanded access to "public life." However, quota laws can be corruptly manipulated by powerholding officials who exclude women from crucial positions where final decisions are made [11].

The second is *The Downside of Gender Quotas? Institutional Constraints on Women in Mexican State Legislatures* by Par Zetterberg. Taking the examples of two Mexican state legislatures, this paper denies the hypothesis that women who gained seats via gender quotas receive more restrictions than women who gained seats through normal elections [12]. It also supports the data that gender quotas that increase "descriptive representation" —elected people share similar backgrounds with a certain population group—of women also increase "substantive representation" —elected people to advocate for the interests of certain population group—of women and corroborates our hypothesis that more females in the legislature might encourage reforms that promote women's rights [13, 4].

The final piece of examined literature is *Citizenship and Social Class* by T. H. Marshall. In this foundational work in the field of political science, Marshall divides citizenship into three elements: civil, political and social, all of which define and regulate the relationship between an individual and the state. The civil element refers to the "rights necessary for individual freedom," the political to participation in political decisions and the social to basic human rights and liberties that inhere in all individuals living under the protection of a state. To summarize, citizenship is "a status bestowed on those who are full members of a community" [14].

3. Methodology

3.1. Data Collection

The indicators measuring the impact of gender quota laws established in Mexico include the Gender Development Index (GDI) and female labor force participation rate (LFPR). The initial choice was the Gender Inequality Index (GII), but this index includes the dependent variable of the percentage of political representation. The solution is to dissect the GII and remove the index concerning the percentage of women in parliament; the resulting indexes are the GDI and female LFPR, as specified below.

Independent variable (Source: Our World in Data [15]):

- Share of women in parliament: operationalization of gender quotas.
- Scale 0-1 (Originally in percentage, converted to decimals).

Dependent variables (Source for all dependent variables: UNDP [16, 17]):

- Gender development index (GDI): composite index measuring "health, education, and command over economic resources" by genders (male and female). It is an aggregate index for HDI index, life

expectancy at birth, expected years of schooling, mean years of schooling, and GNI per capita. This will account for our term ‘citizenship.’

- Scale 0-1

- Labor force participation rate (LFPR): calculated by dividing the number of women in the labor force by the total population of women. Labor market participation reflects women’s ability to make a living and input their skills into the economy.

- Scale 0-1 (Originally in percentage, converted to decimals).

3.2. Data Analysis

After being obtained from the sources, the data were inputted into an Excel chart, which was then converted into two graphs, one for each dependent variable, as shown in Figure 1 and Figure 2.

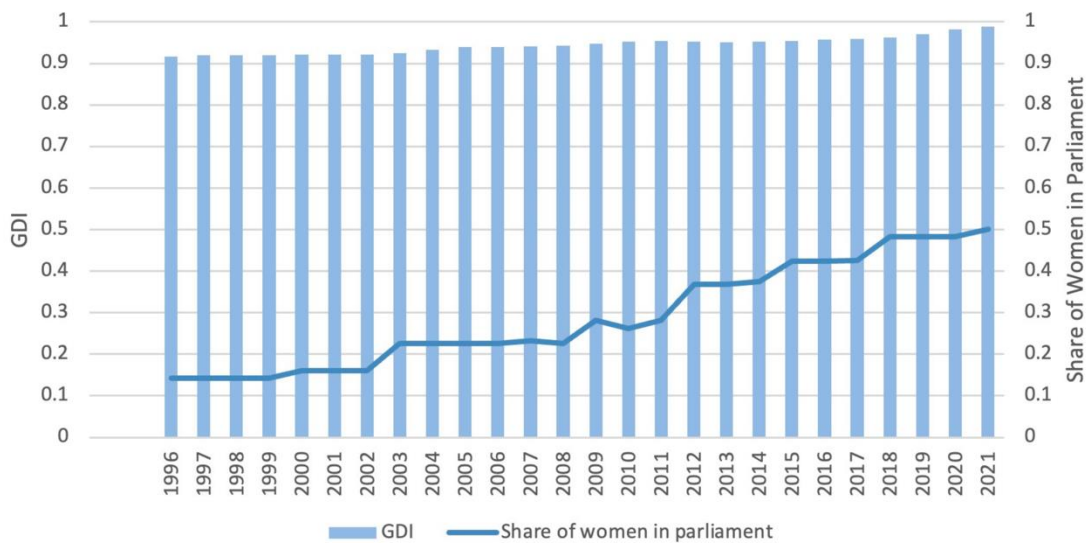


Fig. 1 Gender Quota and Gender Development Index (GDI) in Mexico [15, 16]

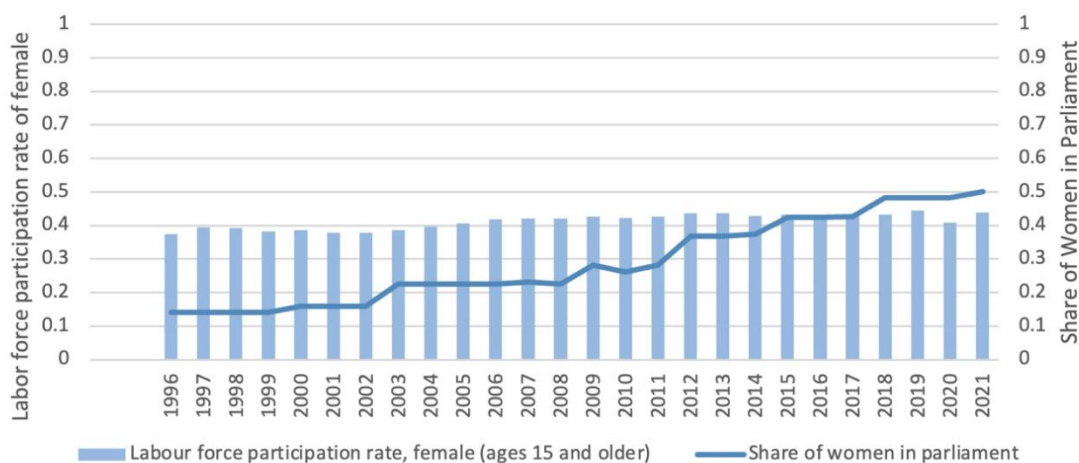


Fig. 2 Gender Quota and Labor Force Participation Rate of Women in Mexico [15, 17]

Specifically, concerning the overall broad evaluation of the data, the mean of GDI and LFPR is 0.95 and 0.41, respectively, while the R-value of GDI and LFPR is 0.94 and 0.82, respectively.

4. Results

In merely 25 years, the number of female legislatures rose from 14.2% to an impressive 50.1%. The standard deviation — and, by extension, variation — of the “share of women in parliament” is relatively large in the analyzed time length, reflecting the effectiveness of quota laws. However, this

single data set cannot prove the increase in women's citizenship in Mexico since it does not specify the percentage of women filling the decision-making seats in parliament. Looking at the dependent variables, the mean labor force participation rate is lower than the world average throughout the time period chosen, but Mexico has made considerable development in this area, increasing the rate by 7% in about three decades [18]. On the other hand, the mean GDI of Mexico is higher than world values [16]. This shows that the country's gender gap is ameliorating, and gender parity is advanced.

By comparing gender quotas and the data collected on the "share of women in parliament", we found that the quota was actually never met between the years 1996 and 2020 (i.e. the percentage required at the time was not fulfilled) [17]. Only during the most recent election in 2021 did the percentage reach 50%, aligning with the 2014 constitutional amendment. Despite failing to meet the threshold, during years when quota laws were implemented or reformed, there was a rise in the degree of female citizenship in the subsequent legislative election years (the Mexican legislature is elected every 3 years) [6]. For example, the implementation of reinforcement mechanisms on the 30% quota law in 2002 took effect in the 2003 legislative election where the percentage of women legislators rose by 6%. In addition, the 2014 amendment improved women's representation by 5% in the 2015 election. During the observations, there was one specific year that stood out: 2012. There was no quota law reform the previous year, but the share of women elected that year skyrocketed by 8.6%, which was concluded to be the combined results of the election and a previous scandal [10]. Even though the number of women in the parliament did not meet the quota, the increase in female legislators improved the level of citizenship of women in Mexico. The R-value of both GDI and labor force participation rate of females older than 15 indicates a positive correlation with the independent variable.

5. Discussions

5.1. Significance

Although the percentage was unable to be met for the vast majority of election cycles since the implementation of the first quota policy, the number of female legislators in office still had significant rises during every election. This fact is especially true during the years with significant policy reform, such as when the bar of the quota was raised or when enforcement mechanisms were strengthened. Moreover, as previously mentioned, the degree of citizenship for every-day women in Mexico also increased along those lines.

The significance of this phenomenon is that many of the arguments against affirmative action policies such as a quota center around the idea that these policies will not be properly enforced in the first place and will therefore have little effect. However, the case in Mexico proves against this. Even if loopholes are persistent and the mandated percentage in quotas are never met, it is still able to increase descriptive representation of women in politics, as well as WSR and women's citizenship in general. This suggests that affirmative action policies provide incentives for change and are able to produce results regardless of compliance and enforcement.

5.2. Limitations

There are two key areas of limitations in the research. First, the most recent version of the quota law was passed in 2014, which means that there are only 9 years of available data concerning the effectiveness of the final quota. This could potentially mean that the correlation might be invalid, since less than a decade might not be enough time for the quota's effects to take place. Second, the quota laws were oftentimes not representative of the percentage of women in parliament. For instance, only in 2021 was the quota fulfilled. In addition, during a 2012 scandal, many female legislatures were pressured by their parties to resign on their first day in office to make way for their male suplentes [10].

6. Conclusion

This research paper focuses on how the institution and strengthening of gender quotas affect the level of citizenship of women, measured through two indices: GDI and labor force participation rate of females 15 and older. The empirical and quantitative data collected demonstrate that there is a positive correlation between the percentage of women in parliament and the degree of citizenship, supporting the hypothesis. Though, this relation could be due to the influence of democratization in Mexico. This research only looks at correlations and not causations. It is something that could be extended on. Also, if allowed, there is potential to look into more Spanish sources to get an interior perspective.

Appendix

The following are relevant statistics during data evaluation.

Independent Variable - Share of Women in Parliament

MAX	0.501
MIN	0.142
STD	0.12516063
MEAN	0.29101538
MEDIAN	0.247

Dependent Variable 1 - GDI

MAX	0.989
MIN	0.917
STD	0.02003382
MEAN	0.94407692
MEDIAN	0.9455
R-VALUE	0.93689097

Dependent Variable 2 - Labor Force Participation Rate of Women (ages 15 and older)

MAX	0.44543
MIN	0.3749
STD	0.02233108
MEAN	0.412515
MEDIAN	0.420165
R-VALUE	0.81513694

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