ABSTRACT.

The paper aims the analysis of women’s political representation and participation in Latin America, underlying some specific features of the Andinos countries (Ecuador, Peru and Bolivía).

The first objective of this piece of work resides in checking the quality of this infra-representation. For that purpose, we are going to employ quantitative data in order to measure the real proportion of women representation in parliamentary chambers as well as in executive organs, at national level.

In a second phase, we are going to examine in depth how these processes have taken place, and which factors or variables have been more involved. We underline political and institutional barriers, but also social and cultural dimensions that, combined with educational levels and socialisation processes, have provoked a more difficult access of women to the decision-taking processes. Therefore, we test the interaction between the institutional factors, the economic development, and the socio-demographic variables.

This development is particularly multifaceted in the Andinos countries because of their complex social structure (particularly, the ethnic diversity of their societies). Although, the process of political decentralisation impulses different types of women participation in general, and have opened the possibility of new ways of representation and a new forms of understanding the public sphere.
Literature Review

During last twenty years, the debate around women’s political representation has increasingly become a constant in many research works, that has been framed not only in sociological field of study but also in political science. In that sense, numerous empirical studies of a corporative nature, have been developed and supported on powerful quantitative analysis of various countries. Authors have underlined that elements involved in female’s representation at national level are quite varied, political ones as well as economic, social or cultural.

Particularly significant is for Kenworthy and Malami (1999), the structure of the electoral system –proportional representation, firstly, but also closed lists and multimember constituencies- that seems to impulse female’s representation\(^1\). In the same line, we find some arguments coming from some authors like Htun (2002), Norris (1985, 1987), Paxton (1997), Reynolds (1999) and Rule (1981, 1987, 1994). According to Rule (1994: 689): “favourable societal conditions will not substitute for unfavourable electoral systems for women to reach their optimal representation in parliament and local legislatures. But unfavourable contextual conditions –including cultural biases and discriminatory practices- can be overcome to a great extent by alternate electoral systems”. In this sense, institutional design is viewed as a means to mitigate the residual effect of women’s marginalization on their ability to participate competitively in the political landscape. Political parties can be also crucial factors in allowing women access in equal numbers (Baer 1993; Caul 1999, 2001; Gallagher 1988; Giele & Smock 1997; Kohn 1980; Lovenduski & Hills 1981). The ideological position of the ruling political party is also something to emphasise, given that right wing parties are expected to support more conservative and traditional values, that discourage women’s participation in politics (Norris 1985, 1987; Rule 1987). We have to underline as well the moment in which extension of universal suffrage to women is taking place (Rule

\(^1\) Proportional representation systems, and more specifically larger district magnitude and party lists, are considered more permissive as they allow parties to field multiple candidates and permit the election of more than one representative per district, and therefore, they are considered friendlier to women and minorities as they emphasize the party rather than specific candidates. However, the strength of the relationship between electoral systems and women’s representation in parliament is empirically less obvious. There are mixed results about the salience of electoral systems. Kenworthy and Malami (1999) and Reynolds (1999) show that electoral rules can increase or impede women’s representation both in developed and developing states, whereas Matland (1998), Moore & Schackman (1996) and Oakes and Almquist (1993) find that, outside the industrialized countries, these institutions had no effect. As it has been mentioned, these inconsistent results may be attributed to the use of different samples, small sample size and very limited time-series (Cherif, 2004).
1981; Sivard 1985; Bollen, Jackman and Kim 1996; Bollen 1998), and cultural attitudes towards women’s political role (Paxton 1997).

Many of these analyses have been focused in the study of the most industrialised democracies, whereas those that have included processes of non-industrialised countries were forced to insist in the determinism of structural, economic and social aspects. Empirical evidence points to the salience of women’s socioeconomic status as a predictor of the representation (Matland 1998; Moore & Shackman 1996; Oakes & Almquist 1993; Rule 1987, 1991). Theoretically, the importance of socioeconomic development is advanced on multiple grounds. Firstly, women are stronger candidates and more likely to be elected or appointed to office when they have distinguished themselves (women’s professional experience increases as a function of their education and work experience). Secondly, women will feel more qualified to serve in positions of political authority as their level of education and professionalisation increases. Thirdly, women become more aware of the opportunities available to them as they become more socialized into public life. But as we have said previously regarding the importance of institutional elements, while there is evidence to suggest that women’s access to political office depends, at least in part, on their socioeconomic status, the record is mixed. Rule (1987,1991), in her examination of approximately two dozen democracies in the early 1970’s and 1980’s, finds that the percentage of women in the labour market and carrying college degrees leads to a greater number of women in national parliaments. By contrast, Norris (1985), examining a similar set of countries, finds no effect for either variables. Matland (1998) and Moore and Schackman (1996) suggest that female labour force participation rather than educational achievement enhances women’s representation.

Besides women’s socioeconomic status, Kenworthy and Malami (1999) underline that more developed countries may be less constrained by questions of economic growth, and that parties and citizens may be more able to consider other factors, such as gender equality when appointing candidates and voting. Alternatively, more developed societies may advance more women to public office, because on average these states provide more and better opportunities –in terms of education, professional development- for their citizens.

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2 These studies strengthen the findings of previous analysis by Anderson (1975), Welch (1977) y Togeby (1994) that showed that participation in the labour force has consistently been found to have a significant and positive effect on women’s level of political activity.
As we have already stated, the trend to reduce the explanation of political processes only to social, economic and cultural variables, has involved normally that the institutional and organisational means of political live have been almost forgotten, and were considered irrelevant for this purposes. In the following lines, we will try to vindicate the importance of formal political institutions in the process of incorporating women to positions of political decision and representation.

### Study Framework and Hypotheses

As we have shown in the prior part, women’s political infra-representation has been impulse by several factors. We could differentiate between those socio-economic dimensions involve in the process, as well as the more institutional ones.

Regarding to the socio-economic factors, we can talk as to the potential influence different elements as economic development, women’s employment and education position, and religious main confession. In that sense, is reasonable to assume that in the poorest countries, in those places where the insertion of women to the labour market has been limited, in countries where women levels of education are significantly low, and in those parts of the world where the occurrence existence Islamic religion is elevated, the stage of women’s presence in the decision-making process is still incomplete. These arguments lead to our first group of hypotheses:

- **H1**: The wealthier a country is, the higher is women’s political representation.
- **H2**: Countries with a consolidated level of female education are countries were women’s political representation is higher.
- **H3**: The more extended is the presence of women in the labour market, the more complete is women’s political representation.
- **H4**: The less introduced in the Islamic religion, the higher is it women’s political representation.

In what concern to the institutional dimension, we can consider diverse factors related to the quality of democracy, the configuration of the electoral system, the state ideological profession, the level of women’s movement development, and the legal confirmation of specific gender rights. In that sense, we could say that countries with electoral systems ruled by a proportional principle of representation, and countries

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3 The importance of political and institutional factors for the Latin American case has been already underscored by Del Campo (2005).
where a system of quotas was legally introduced for assuring females presence in electoral lists, are potentially stimulating women’s political representation. This idea frames our second group of hypotheses:

H5: The more consolidated are democratic principles in the country, the higher is women’s political representation.
H6: The longer the right of universal suffrage is extended to women, the more political representation females have obtained.
H7: The more proportional the electoral system is, the easier is taking part in the decision-making process for females.
H8: The introduction of women representation quotas by law, involves an effective increase of women’s political participation.
H9: The more developed is women’s movement organisation, the higher is women’s political representation.
H10: In states with a Marxist-Leninist ideological profession, the promotion of women’s political participation is higher.
H11: In those countries where the abortion right is legally recognised, women’s political participation is higher.

Method

Our data comes from a file that can be freely downloaded from the Internet\(^4\). This data set includes distinct variables that are quite useful for the process our hypotheses’ empirical verification. The records are updated till 1999. The data matrix treats the countries as the main analytical unit, and the sample incorporates 191 states and diverse information related to the topic under study, that is, the political representation of women, and to some potential explicative factors.

Before turning to the explanation of the empirical strategy that we are planning to operate, we can identify the organisation of our variables according to our hypotheses.

**Dependent variable**

As we have advanced previously, the dimension we want to give explanation to women’s political representation in the region mentioned. The indicator through which

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we will define the dependent variable is measured by percentage of women in the national parliament.

*Independent variables.*

Having said that we are trying to find the dimensions that could potentially explain women’s political infra-representation, we selected as independent variables of our model:

1. Electoral System.
2. Female suffrage tradition.
3. Implementation of electoral quotas.
4. Quality of democracy.
5. Female’s education.
6. Female’s labour presence.
7. Women’s organisation.
8. Economic wealth.
10. State ideological profession.
11. Existence of abortion right.

All these dimensions were offered by country, what allowed us to run some statistical procedures for verifying the hypothesis.

Regarding to the research technique that has been planned in order to confirm our hypotheses, we have to say that we have decided on a more quantitative perspective. During the first stage, we have considered presenting some descriptive data in order to x-ray the situation in which we have derived. Afterwards, in a second phase we have contemplated running some statistical procedures in order illustrate the connection of the variables taken into account. We will calculate correlations in order to validate the presence of significant statistical connections between the variables and also the weight of them.

More concretely, we will describe the values registered at the aggregate level, but also categorising the results by geographic areas (Africa, Middle East, Asia, Latin America, Eastern Europe, Western Europe), something that eases the introduction of a comparative strategy.
Findings

Female’s representation in the Parliament represents, with the exception of Nordic countries, a constant in the debate as to democratic intensification. The Table 1 shows the average of women’s representation in national parliaments, by geographic areas. The 33 countries that constitute the Latin American sample register a value of 11.3 per cent, half of the percentage of Western Europe, but higher than the one obtained for Eastern Europe, Africa, Asia and the Middle East.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Geographic Areas</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>No. of countries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Latin America</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Europe</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Europe</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle East</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>10.1%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


As we can see in the dispersion value employed in Table 1, variations between Latin American countries can be identified. Figure 1 illustrates the differences mentioned. In general, we have evidence to say that the political representation of women is higher at the parliamentary level than at the governmental one.

If we take into account the representation of women in national Parliaments, we can see that Costa Rica, Argentina and Cuba are reasonably up-averaged. Brazil and specially Paraguay, with only 3 percent, are the countries where the magnitude of our dependent variable is lower. At the Governmental level, Peruvian Government is one of the cases were women’s representation is lower, with Ecuador and even Argentina, showing the latter the opposite trend at the parliamentary level. Chile, El Salvador, Honduras y Venezuela are the countries with the highest level of women’s political participation in the Government.
Socio-Economic Factors.

Through the H1 we tried to check the role of the state economic prosperity in the impulsion women’s political participation, taking the Gross Domestic Product Per Capita as the reference. Results in Table 2 confirm that at the global level, the wealthier is a country, the higher is women’s representation in the Parliament, with a coefficient of .436. This trend cannot be demonstrated with statistical signification at any other level, including the Latin American one.

As assumed by H2, is also reasonable to think that female’s level of instruction could be determining in the progression of women’s political participation. Table 2 shows that this proofs completely to be right if we don’t distinguish regions geographically. At the aggregate level, countries with a consolidated level of female education are countries were women’s political representation is higher, with a Pearson’s value of .296. At the level of geographic areas none of them portrayed this pattern, neither in Latin America.
H3 stated that the more extended is the presence of women in the labour market, the more complete is women’s political representation. Again, this hypothesis proofs to be right to some extent but not completely. The higher is women’s insertion in the labour market, the higher is women’s presence in the parliament. This happens globally (.246), and with a special strength in the Middle East (.583), Western Europe (.581), and Asia (.412).

H4 stated that the less introduced is the Islamic religion, the higher is it women’s political representation. The state religious profession was measured in two different ways, taking as a reference separately the Catholic religion and the Islamic one.

Firstly, only in Eastern and Western Europe the extension of Catholicism is a factor of female’s political representation determination. Although only in those areas we found a significant connection, we have to say that this occurs in an opposite
direction; in both cases Catholicism has a role in our dependent variable, but in Easter Europe positively (.650) and in Western Europe negatively (-.554).

Secondly, the fact that the more extended is Islamism in a country, the lower is women’s representation in the parliament holds true in global terms (-.306), but this cannot be tested at any other level.

**Institutional Factors:**

H5 includes a constant variable that is supposed to be an important factor in the explanation of women’s political representation, the effective consolidation of democratic principles. For this concrete analysis, quality of democracy was measured ranked in a 7 point-scale. Table 3 proves that the deeper is democracy, the higher is women’s representation in the Parliament. This is not only happening significantly at the global level, with a correlation coefficient of .310, but also in Africa (.297) and Eastern Europe (.749). Finally, we have to underline that we found a significant correlation in Asia as well, but surprisingly in the opposite way (-.502): in this area the worse is the quality of democracy, the higher women’s representation in the Parliament.

H6 assumed that the longer the female suffrage has been active, the more political representation women have obtained. This assumption proofs to be correct at the general level (-.433). If we examine these results at particular areas, we realise that the trend is occurring significantly as well in the Middle East and Western Europe, and especially in the last case showing a Pearson’s coefficient of -.606.

H7 and H8 had to do with the configuration of the electoral system. The first one understood that the more proportional is the electoral system, the easier is taking part in the decision-making process for females. The results found in Table 3 demonstrate that this is only true at the aggregate level. Concretely, in none of the areas this trend is taking place.
### TABLE 3
Bilateral Correlations by Geographic Areas
Institutional Variables.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLES</th>
<th>Female’s Representation in National Parliament</th>
<th>Institutional Variables</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
<th>Africa</th>
<th>Middle East</th>
<th>Asia</th>
<th>Latin America</th>
<th>Eastern Europe</th>
<th>Western Europe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quality of Democracy</td>
<td>Pearson</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.310(**)</td>
<td>.297(*)</td>
<td>-.020</td>
<td>-.502(**)</td>
<td>-.080</td>
<td>.749(**)</td>
<td>(.a)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td></td>
<td>175</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>32</td>
<td></td>
<td>33</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year of Universal Suffrage</td>
<td>Pearson</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.433(**)</td>
<td>.007</td>
<td>-.498(*)</td>
<td>-.193</td>
<td>-.042</td>
<td>-.420</td>
<td>-.606(**)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td></td>
<td>172</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>32</td>
<td></td>
<td>33</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electoral System (Proportional)</td>
<td>Pearson</td>
<td></td>
<td>.274(**)</td>
<td>-.184</td>
<td>.189</td>
<td>.236</td>
<td>.224</td>
<td>.280</td>
<td>.411</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td></td>
<td>168</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>29</td>
<td></td>
<td>33</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female’s Organisation Level</td>
<td>Pearson</td>
<td></td>
<td>.335(**)</td>
<td>.242</td>
<td>.409</td>
<td>.049</td>
<td>.219</td>
<td>.046</td>
<td>.088</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td></td>
<td>151</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>27</td>
<td></td>
<td>25</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideology (Marxism/ Leninism)</td>
<td>Pearson</td>
<td></td>
<td>.239(**)</td>
<td>(.a)</td>
<td>(.a)</td>
<td>.766(**)</td>
<td>.361(*)</td>
<td>(.a)</td>
<td>(.a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td></td>
<td>175</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>32</td>
<td></td>
<td>33</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Existence of Legal Abortion</td>
<td>Pearson</td>
<td></td>
<td>.240(**)</td>
<td>.052</td>
<td>.464</td>
<td>.307</td>
<td>.057</td>
<td>-.231</td>
<td>.173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td></td>
<td>169</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
<td>33</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(*) Correlation Significant at the level 0.05 (bilateral).
(**) Correlation Significant at the level 0.01 (bilateral).
(a) Cannot be calculated; at least one variable is constant.


H8 is related to the efficiency of the introduction of quotas by law in order to assure a minimum presence of women in Parliament. Data nature made impossible the application of the same analysis dynamics. Consequently, we introduced another analytical logic for verifying this hypothesis. As revealed by Figure 2, the progression of female’s political participation in Latin America is presenting an increasing trend in last years, but is very probable that this impulse has been particularly caused by the introduction of legal quotas.
Ecuador, Bolivia and Peru are very good examples of what has been explained in the last paragraph. The difference in very significant in those countries but specially in Ecuador, with more than 12 points. This proportion is of about 9 points in Bolivia and of a bit more than 7 in Peru. Meanwhile in Colombia and Venezuela, where the quotas system was misplaced, the trend is the same but less considerable: almost unperceivable in the Colombian case, and of around 4 points in Venezuela.

The quotas system is proof to be an effective legal measure in order to guarantee a growing political presence of women.

H9 deals with the role of the organisational level of women’s movement in the process of increasing of female’s political participation. The more developed is women’s movement organisation, the more effective pressure in promoting a higher women’s political participation. Results of bivariate correlations of Table 3 confirm, only at the general level, that the more organised are women, the higher is women’s representation in the parliament, with a correlation coefficient of .335. However, this pattern is not followed by none of the areas with a statistical signification.
H10 is related to the ideological system that rules the country, and more specifically with the idea that Marxist-Leninist ideological profession is presumed to promote more efficiently women’s political participation. At the global level this hypothesis proof to be accurate, showing a Pearson’s value of .239: The more present is Marxism in a country, the higher is women’s representation in the parliament. Turning to the analysis by geographic area we find that not only in Asia, with an important correlation of .766, but also in Latin America, with a record of .361, the correlations are taking place with statistical signification. Nevertheless, we have to say that this variable has to be interpreted really carefully, particularly in the Latin American case. Among the 33 countries of Latin America, we only found the Cuban case registered as a Marxist-Leninist political system. Its level of female’s parliamentary representation is reasonably high (around 28 percent), a fact that explains this surprising trend and its signification.

Finally, H11 is dealing with the particular position played by the existence of some specific “gender rights”. In this case, we examined the importance of the legal recognition of the abortion, which is presumed to be an indicator of women’s liberation and, therefore, could be assumed to play an impulse of women’s political participation. At the general level, countries where this concrete right is legally recognised, women’s political participation is higher, with a coefficient of .240. Yet, the abortion expressed as mentioned is not connected to women’s representation in Parliaments at the disaggregate level. In none of the areas taken into account a statistical signification was found in that sense.

Discussion

As we could see, not only social and economic factors explain the level of women’s political representation. If we take into account different dimensions, more biased to an institutional viewpoint, we can come to the conclusion that at the global realm those factors have also an important role in relation to our dependent variable. Ranking the weight of different factors in the explanation of the dependent variable, and taking as a reference the value of Pearson’s correlation coefficients, we have to point firstly at the GDPPC, followed by the length of an effective universal suffrage, the level of female’s organisation, the quality of democracy, the religion, women’s education, the
configuration of the electoral systems, the insertion of women in labour market, the existence of legal abortion and, finally, the Marxist ideological confession of the State.

At the regional level was quite difficult to find significant correlations. The Latin American case was a good example of it. Statistically is difficult to assume any of the hypotheses since the marginal distribution of the variables of reference is quite stable through the countries that are include in the sample (33), something that makes complex obtaining significant connections. The only variable that is significant is the ideological confession and is presenting the problem we already mentioned.

As shown by the data exposed, for the Andinos countries the inclusion of legal quotas in Bolivia, Ecuador and Peru (1997) helped to understand the quantitative growth of women’s representation⁵, whereas in the Colombian and Venezuelan cases, where the quotas system was eliminated (Colombia) or not even passed (Venezuela), female’s representation is significantly lower.

In that sense, we have to say that not all the electoral results have projected the intention of the quota system. It has to be said that systems ruled with open lists do not ease the process of pushing women’s political participation. That means that also it would be recommendable to recognise a placement mandate, which means that also women priority in the list rank has to be mandatory for the list final configuration.

Also we have to insist in the fact that sometimes dimensions involved were hard to measure, and cross-nationally comparable data were simply not available.

Summarising, two factors have to be underlined in this first approximation to women’s participation in Andinos countries. The relative importance of some traditional aspects, and the significance of the legal reform that makes compulsory the recognition of quotas.

⁵ Bolivia established in 1997 a women’s representation quota of 30 percent for the lower house, not for the senate. The percentage of women in the congress was 11,5 percent in the elections of 1997, and this was raised till 18,5 percent in 2003. In the Senate house was of 3,7 percent, and it was increased to 14,8 percent in 2003. In the Equatorial case, the percentage established by law was of 20 percent, increasing this value to 30 percent in 2003. The percentage in the chamber was of 3,7 percent in 1997, whereas reached 16 percent in 2000. In the case of Peru, the reform of 1997 recognised a percentage of 25 of women’s representation, that was augmented to 30 percent in 2000. The percentage of women in the Peruvian congress came from 10,8 percent in 1997, to 18,3 percent in 2003. Colombia has no legal reform that imposes quotas for legislative elections but it has one regarding the selection of governmental posts (Executive power). In the case of Venezuela, quotas system was abolished after a while.
References


