

CONSERVATIVE MODERNIZATION IN BRAZIL: BLOCKING LOCAL WOMEN'S POLITICAL PATHWAYS TO POWER

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Introduction

Brazilian politics has long been an arena that is difficult for women to enter, unless they are the wives, widows or wards of men. The nature of the Brazilian political system, pervasive patriarchal, clientelist and patrimonial political culture, the weaknesses of identification with political parties and their ideologies, and a lack of connectivity between female candidates and the kind of issues and demands that are being made by women's groups and movements account for some of the reasons for the obstacles that continue to hamper women's pathways into political power. In recent years, the Brazilian women's movement have sought strategies to strengthen women's political representation, calling upon the government to enhance the effectiveness of the quota law that was brought onto the statute books in 1995 but has remained without significant positive effect on electoral outcomes. It is only very recently, with the electoral reforms of 2012, that systems have been put in place that strengthen the sanctions that can be used against political parties who fail to comply with the requirements of the law.

This chapter analyses the social and political conditions that define and characterize the participation of women in local government in Brazil, as it has evolved over the last 30 years. It seeks to identify possible changes in the mechanisms of access to power and to remaining in power, and to explore the trajectories and political practices, links and party political identities among other questions related to empowerment. Drawing on a longitudinal study of women politicians in the north-eastern state of Bahia in which electoral cohorts of elected municipal councillors and mayors were surveyed on their political careers, their motivations for entering politics, their political connections and experiences as members of political parties and the obstacles and assistance they had encountered along those pathways into politics, this chapter compares the experiences of women in the 1988, 1992 and 1998 cohorts (COSTA, 1998) with women elected as municipal councillors in 2008 and 2012 as part of the activities of the Pathways

of Women's Empowerment research programme. It draws on these data to analyse barriers and opportunities in women's pathways of political empowerment.

Political Structures in Brazil

The Brazilian Federal Constitution of 1988 gave relative autonomy to municipalities, designating them as the third sphere of power. The municipality is the smallest cell of formal power in the Brazilian political system, and refers to the territorial area of a city and the surrounding regions circumscribed under its jurisdiction, including the periphery, villages, districts and the adjoining countryside. The constitutional autonomy granted to the municipality guarantees citizens the capacity to experience wider democratic processes through participation in municipal government, to address their local problems, and to develop laws that are more directly related to their everyday lives and societies. This autonomy is relative because it is subordinate to the sovereign power of the Federation.

The municipality has a similar structure to that of the other two spheres of government: the executive elected through direct majority elections and a legislative whose councillors are elected through proportional elections. In both structures, the leaders are elected for a term of four years. Both mayor and councillors are elected by those citizens of the municipality eligible to vote. The executive is responsible for the management and control of municipal utilities. The city chamber is responsible for creating laws that are within the jurisdiction of the municipality (tax system, public services, exemptions and tax breaks, for example), for monitoring the activities of the mayor, and for public expenditure. The councillor is a kind of bridge between citizens and the municipality, responsible for bringing the demands of the people to the attention of the executive.

Brazil has 5563 municipalities which vary in size according to the number of inhabitants, ranging from a minimum of 9 councillors in municipalities with small populations of up to 20,000 inhabitants, to a maximum of 55 councillors in large municipalities with larger

populations, such as São Paulo, Brazil's largest city. Based on this distribution by groups of inhabitants in Brazil, 48.02 per cent of municipalities are defined as having a small population, 41.84 per cent are medium-sized (with between 20,000 and 50,000 inhabitants), and only 10.14 per cent are considered large with a population of more than 50,000 inhabitants. This means that although the majority of Brazilian citizens live in large cities (51.98 per cent), small municipalities still have an important weight in the national composition.

In the field of social development this distribution also presents a significant diversity that involves large rural areas trapped in the past and cities saturated with intense rural migration without possibility of urban integration. These are the *favelas* (shanty towns). Their problems of marginality and social conflict dominate the peripheries of large cities. This picture of peripheral development has implications for women's political participation. In large or medium-sized cities, where the modernizing presence of capitalism is felt in the centres of the reproduction and distribution of services, the presence of women in the paid labour force and in the circulation of employment and unemployment is very significant. According to data from the *Departamento Intersindical de Estudos e Estatísticas Socioeconômicas* – DIEESE (Inter-union Department of Studies and Socio-Economic Statistics), women represented 44 per cent of the economically active population of Brazil in 2009 (DIEESE, 2009). By December 2011, women represented 42 per cent of registered workers and comprised 58.53 per cent of those workers who had completed higher education (Brazilian Government, Ministry of Labour, 2011). It is these women who will become part of civil activist movements. These are the women who, in increasing numbers, are participating in the leadership of unions and professional associations, in popular neighbourhood movements, in landless peoples' struggles, and in the struggles for housing of the homeless and for better living conditions.

Despite these advantages, the majority of women still live their lives subject to the values and perspectives of rural life and are far from a true understanding of what we could call a critical feminist consciousness. Still isolated in their small towns, conditioned by traditional values yet subjected to significant levels of domestic violence that involves them emotionally and culturally, some of these women, even as they participate in

political activities, are still trapped in the patriarchal structures and values that dominate most of these municipalities where family interests, patrimonialism and clientelism work to dilute those relations that express essentially political interests. The control of local political power remains in the hands of old families and/or oligarchic political groups. Many studies of local government in Brazil have demonstrated the importance of political and kin ties with a political group as one of the main means of access to power even in elected positions. The "conservative modernization" pursued by the Brazilian state changed relations of production in the municipalities, but has not brought significant changes in traditional structures of power for the majority of the population.

Women and Politics in Brazil

Women won the right to vote in Brazil in 1932 and experienced a sort of honeymoon with power until 1937, when, because of a coup d'état, the entire set of constitutional guarantees of Brazilian citizens was curtailed. Only from 1945, with re-democratization, did women actually begin to exercise the right to vote. Today, 80 years after they won the right to vote, and representing 51.8 per cent of the national electorate, Brazilian women still largely remain out of power. According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) in July 2013 Brazil ranked 120th out of 189 countries in the world for women's political representation within national parliament. In the last general election which took place in October 2010, despite the election of Dilma Rousseff as President of the Republic, women continued to be in the minority within the structures of power, representing only 8.8 per cent of the Federal Chamber (Lower House) and 14.1 per cent of the Senate (Upper House), and 12.85 per cent in the State Legislative Assemblies.

Various factors contribute to the maintenance women's exclusion from the world of formal politics: the persistence of a patriarchal culture dominant in politics, manifested in the resistance to the incorporation of women in party structures, the reluctance of party leaders to nominate women as political candidates for their parties, the lack of resources (or autonomy to manage them) for the financing of election campaigns which have become increasingly expensive in Brazil. This is coupled with the persistence of the patrimonial

and clientelistic culture that has controlled electoral politics in Brazil, that today lies beneath the dominion of local political bosses and their family networks. This conjunction of practices has served not only to keep women out of power, but also to maintain the dominance of conservatism in the Brazilian legislature.

Nevertheless, historically, in Brazil and throughout Latin America, the representative space at the municipal level, both the executive and the legislature, have been the favoured space for women's political involvement. It is in the municipal *Conselhos* (participatory sectoral policy institutions associated with the executive) and in the leadership of the local executive where women's political participation registers better indices. The proximity of home and the possibility of political exercise more closely directed at private or family interests are facilitating factors. However, this is not to say that women are even adequately represented in these political spaces, because as can be seen from the following two tables, the percentage of women elected to lead municipal executives has risen over the last three decades but remains low.

Table 1 – Female Participation in the Municipal Executive, Mayoral Elections 1988-2012

Election Year	Percentage of Women Elected as Mayor
1982	3.0
1988	2.4
1992	3.4
1996	5.5
2000	5.7
2004	7.52
2008	9.1
2012	12.3

As can be seen from this table, in the most recent municipal elections, in October 2012, only 12.3 per cent of the country's mayors were women. Overall, 672 women were elected, 98.6 per cent of whom belong to municipalities considered to be medium or small in size. An interesting fact in relation to these data is that the majority of women were elected in the most backward regions in the country where there is a predominance of patriarchal and clientelistic relations and particular families or political groups hold the reins of local political dynamics.

Table 2 – Female Participation in the Municipal Legislative

Election Year	Percentage of Women Elected
1982	3.0
1988	3.0
1992	7.5
1996	11.2
2000	11.6
2004	12.62
2008	12.52
2012	13.3

The same characteristics that appear in the municipal executive of low indices of elected women are reproduced in elections for the legislative, the Municipal Chamber. In the municipal elections of October 2012, 51,965 municipal councillors were elected across the country as a whole, of which only 6,911 (13.3 per cent) were women.

It is interesting to note that since the elections of 1996, the growth in the number of women elected to municipal councils has been negligible, remaining virtually stagnant, or – in the case of the elections of 2008, slipping back. What is significant about this data is that it coincides with Law 9.100 of 29 September 1995 which established a system of quotas at the federal, state and municipal levels coming into force.

Initially, the law provided for a 20 per cent quota for women among all the candidates for the legislative in proportional elections. Law 9.504 raised the quota to 25 per cent from the 1998 elections and to 30 per cent from the next elections. However, the quota system that was introduced in Brazil proved to be feeble, not having any mechanism to guarantee that political parties meet the requirement for 30 per cent of their candidates to be women, i.e. there was no kind of penalty for those who did not comply. Another weakness of the Brazilian quota law was that it did not consider making available either a guarantee of access to party financial resources, or access to the free party political broadcast time on radio and television for women candidates. The law also failed to envisage putting in place mechanisms to encourage parties to engage in political training for women, and did not guarantee that the same percentage of women would be amongst those elected in each election (COSTA, 2010a; b; ARAÚJO, 2007; 2009).

In September 2009, the Brazilian National Congress promoted a kind of mini electoral reform (Law 12.034/09). With the new electoral law, parties became obliged to designate 5 per cent of party funds to women's political training, and 10 per cent of the time that they were given for party political broadcasts to promote and disseminate the political participation of women. The law also outlines a punishment for those who fail to comply with the 5 per cent rule, establishing a fine that would add another 2.5 per cent of the resources in the party's annual funds to actions that will build women's political capacities. The impact of this electoral law on the indices of women's political participation in elections to federal and state legislatures in 2010 was barely felt; until now, there is no information on the application of any sanctions at all on parties who failed to comply with the quota.¹

The difficulty confronted by the women's caucus in negotiating and gaining approval for its initiatives, such as more effective electoral legislation in relation to the quota system, reflects exactly the significance of the political force of women in the National Congress, where the proportion of female politicians is less than 10 per cent of the total number of parliamentarians in both chambers. With the absence of women from the negotiating tables and the difficulty of acting in concert, submerged as they are in a sea of patriarchal and party interests, it is difficult to imagine them succeeding in pursuing processes of change or reform. The same difficulties are felt by women councillors in the municipal chambers.

A major step forward in terms of the improvement of the quota law was made by the Supreme Electoral Court with an instruction given on Resolution No. 23,373 regulating the municipal elections of October 2012, making it mandatory under the law to veto the registration of candidate lists by political parties that had not attained the quota of female candidates. This resolution made the difference in the municipal elections

of 2012 when the percentage of female candidates reached 31.5 per cent, contrasting with 21.9 per cent in 2008. However, the resolution also brought a new dimension to women's political participation, the so-called 'orange candidates'.² A significant number of women who did not get any votes were characterized as 'orange candidates', that is, women who lend their name so that the party is able to ensure that its list is registered. All over the country, allegations of ghost candidates appeared in various municipalities when the election results were announced. Another significant fact providing evidence of parties' attempts to circumvent the quota law, and what is worse, with women's connivance, is the high number of candidates who were housewives. According to data on the candidates held by the Superior Electoral Court (TSE), 22,789 candidates for municipal councillor in 2012 declared that their principal occupation was 'housewife'. In 2008 there were 9,869 candidates with this occupation. This signifies an increase of 131 per cent between 2008 and 2012. In 2008, 'housewives' occupied 9th place in the list of occupations pursued by female candidates. In 2012, 'housewife' moved to 4th place. This raises a question as to whether these women, who come from sufficiently privileged backgrounds as to not to need to work, and who do not have a public role, are being used as proxies for their husbands' political careers. The table below gives a better picture of the main occupations amongst female candidates for municipal councillor in Brazil³:

¹ According to data published by the Secretariat for Women's Policies, only 17.3 per cent of political parties and party coalitions in the whole country complied with the quota law in the 2010 elections. See: <http://www.sepm.gov.br/noticias/ultimas_noticias/2010/10/apenas-17-3-dos-partidos-coligacoes-cumpriram-as-cotas-nas-eleicoes-2010>. Accessed on: 20 March 2013.

² 'Orange candidates' in popular Brazilian culture, are those candidates who only occupy a place on the list in service of another candidate or a party, and are not real candidates. The use of ghost or orange candidates is common among political parties in Brazil to be able to benefit from electoral legislation that bars public functionaries from continuing their work during the period of pre-election campaigning, that is, to allow candidates who are public servants to dedicate themselves to electoral campaigning for candidates who are priorities for the party.

³ See: <<http://g1.globo.com/politica/eleicoes/2012/noticia/2012/09/com-cota-numero-de-donas-de-casa-candidatas-aumenta-131-no-pais.html> em 20/11/2012>. Accessed on: 20 March 2013. I am grateful to Jose Eustaquio Alvez for bringing this to my attention.

Table 3 – Professions/Occupations Declared by Candidates for the Municipal Chamber in the Elections of 2008 and 2012

Order of Classification	2008	2012
1 st	Farmer (42,516)	Municipal public servant (39,268)
2 nd	Saleswoman (35,976)	Farmer (38,655)
3 rd	Municipal public servant (25,426)	Saleswoman (35,160)
4 th	Municipal councillor (19,232)	Housewife (22,789)
5 th	Businesswoman (13,047)	Municipal councillor (20,787)
6 th	Primary school teacher (11,682)	Businesswoman (20,494)
7 th	Secondary school teacher (11,224)	Retired (14,860)
8 th	Retired (10,916)	Primary school teacher (13,481)
9 th	Housewife (9,869)	Secondary school teacher (11,509)

Source: Superior Electoral Court (2012)

This table makes explicit the difficulties faced within the entire field of feminist struggles that has focused on instruments for affirmative action to overcome obstacles to the effective exercise of citizenship by women. The Brazilian case is symptomatic in this respect. Over the last 15 years, efforts have been made to put in place legislation that can guarantee the effectiveness of the quota law, but law itself is not enough to bring about the changes that are needed. It is necessary to change the culture of the political parties as well as of the people (men and women) who constitute them.

Despite these difficulties and even at a slow pace, women are attaining a place in formal politics. This experience lends itself to further examination, in order to understand more about the kind of women who engage in politics, to identify opportunities for access and the paths taken for political apprenticeship, as well as the kinds of networks that women are able to establish, points that are essential to think about in order to explore the political action of women in the formal power structures at the municipal level.

Women Councillors and Mayors in Bahia

As is reflected in the tables presented earlier in this chapter, recent years have seen changes in women's entry into politics. The political and economic changes that the country has experienced in this period are reflected in the lives of women. An earlier comparative study of women elected in 1982, 1986 and 1994 (COSTA, 1998) and the more recent study of councillors elected in the 2008 and 2012 elections identify significant changes in women's pathways into political office, as well as in relation to political practice.

The earlier study constructed a representative profile of councillors who occupied a role in the local legislative body in Bahia. The typical profile of a female councillor of that time was a 45 year old Catholic widow, with four children, who had at least completed secondary school and was a primary school teacher until being elected for the first time (COSTA, 1998, p. 148). Today, among the councillors elected in 2008 and 2012, this representative profile has changed. They are mostly legally married (54.3 per cent) with two or three children (69 per cent), and despite the rise of Protestantism in large urban centres they remain predominantly Catholic (70.7 per cent), and have a higher education, the majority having studied at college. The main difference has been the retreat of widows from the local political scene. In the earlier research, they represented 65.3 per cent of women councillors often called to occupy the political space of husbands and to safeguard the interests of hegemonic local groups (COSTA, 1998, p. 149). It is likely that this change is related to improvements in the quality of life of the population, a fall in the mortality rate, and the transfer of the widow's role to her daughter, all set against the background of the democratic consolidation of the Brazilian state.

In the case of mayors, the most significant change has been in the increase in their level of education, with predominance amongst women of higher education, as part of a prior professional career. Also with regard to the previous occupation of these women, other changes are evident. In the previous research, women came primarily from three professional sectors: health care (nurses and midwives), teachers and public employees. Teachers represented 48 per cent of all councillors (COSTA, 1998, p. 151). In the elections of 2008, only

19 per cent of female councillors were teachers. The largest concentration is of public officials, especially in the area of service provision (including health care), who constituted 41 per cent of the elected female councillors. This indicates openings in other professional fields for women other than teaching developing by this period. There was also a significant reduction in the number of women who defined themselves as 'housewife' in 2008 relative to the cohorts who formed part of the earlier study. In Bahia, there were no women councillors who defined themselves as housewives in contrast with the official statistics of the Superior Electoral Court ranking 'housewife' in 9th place relative to other occupations undertaken by women councillors prior to their election, and the recent changes in this composition due to the enforcement of the quota law as discussed earlier.

In the field of political action, the profile of the female municipal councillor has changed completely. While the councillors in the 1980s began their pathways into politics when they put themselves forward as candidates for election, the majority of those elected in 2008 and 2012 had a track record of prior political activism links to social movements and other organizations in civil society. Only 17.2 per cent of those elected in this period said that they had no political experience prior to putting themselves forward as candidates. Women have expanded their activism through the diverse spaces created by participatory democracy. Residents' associations, women's, and religious groups can be found in the small municipalities in Bahia, which then become spaces in which women gain political experience and develop political skills. It is worth noting that 41.4 per cent of the women councillors in the sample said that they participate in or had participated in some kind of women's group. In urban centres, union activism is a significant space for women to gain political skills and access to candidature. Women's reflections on their political trajectories reveal histories of engagement in these different political arenas:

I always participated in social movements. In my municipality, I started participating in a women's group in the church and after that I joined the residents' association. It was there that I began to interest myself in politics. (Female councillor elected in 2008)

When I was at university, I participated in the student movement and then I joined the party. To run as a

candidate was also a decision of my party that thought I'd have a chance. (Female councillor elected in 2008)

I started in the church, in the women's groups, and it was after I joined the Union of Rural Workers I started to think more about politics. In the union I also participated more in women's events. (Female councillor elected in 2008)

In the case of women elected to be mayors, many began their political lives participating or assisting in the election campaigns of husbands or other family members. There are also those amongst them who started engaging in politics when they married, and began to play the role of 'first lady'. According to one Female mayor:

... when I got married, with my husband being mayor and being put in the position of being first lady, I couldn't escape direct contact with the population.

On her prior experience before putting herself forward as a mayoral candidate, she affirmed that it was '*as a wife of a politician, I always participated, for decades, in political activities as a member of the directorate of the party, in political campaigns and so on*'.

One female councillor whose husband did not possess the necessary eligibility as defined by the electoral law because he had changed parties months before the election, explained the reasons behind her own candidature and her evaluation of what made her election:

The campaign was born of a need to defend ideas, work that I believe in above all because I worked, I had a lot of experience alongside... we were classmates in college and graduated together, worked together (...) Suddenly there was a phase of life in which I didn't want to work with him, because I thought that what brought us together was not working together but having identities, thinking the same, one helping the other, this adds up to something in which to believe. Because of this, I agreed to put myself forward for election to defend the things in which we both believed. ... I am aware that the votes aren't mine. In truth, the votes are his. But the mandate is mine, I am responsible for the mandate. In the next election, I can be re-elected or not depending on what I do during my mandate.

One very significant fact that remains unchanged over the three decades studied is the predominance of

political family ties. The earlier study of mayors and councillors elected into the legislatures in Bahia in 1982, 1988 and 1992 identified that 51 per cent of these women had family ties with political officeholders. Among those elected in 2008 and 2012, 65.5 per cent had ties of kinship with people who have exercised or are exercising political mandates. This, incidentally, is not just a specific characteristic of mayors and councillors. We can say that this is a general tendency in Brazilian politics, one that works well for men. It occurs in the state legislative assemblies and even in the national congress. According to Sardinha and Camargo (2011):

One out of each two Federal Deputies in the current legislature has kinship ties with other figures in Brazilian political life. Of the 564 Deputies who took office this year... 271 (48 per cent) are relatives of politicians. They are children, grandchildren, parents, brothers, nephews, uncles, cousins, spouses or former spouses who have or have had tenure, held some kind of position of political appointment or participated in elections. (author translation).

The increase in the percentage of Bahian female politicians with family ties in politics between the two periods can lead us to the conclusion that the process of democratic consolidation that Brazil has experienced since the end of the military dictatorship in 1985 did not succeed in changing clientelistic and patriarchal practices. Indeed, the data suggests quite the opposite: that there has been a strengthening of control on the part of family networks over the formal structures of power in Bahia.

In this context, it can be said that the existence of family ties (primarily as wives, daughters and sisters) can be an important pathway into the world of formal politics. These are women with prestige acquired in the exercise of their professional lives, usually teachers, doctors, midwives and so on, who stand out in relation to men from their political and family group and thus come to be important pieces in the chess game of local dominion. In the words of some of those elected as municipal councillors in 2008 and 2012:

I am affiliated to the party with which my family is connected, it is my father's, brother's and husband's party. My family is political. My father was a State Deputy and was mayor several times. I have several uncles in politics and my husband too. We are in politics

for many years... (Female municipal councillor elected in 2008)

My family has been involved in municipal politics for many years, I was raised in politics, living with politicians participating in elections. When I was asked to be a candidate I thought it was natural. (Female municipal councillor elected in 2012).

Family ties that facilitate the entry of women into formal politics can be one of the main reasons for the candidature of women mayors and councillors. According to one mayor interviewed:

With the objective of giving some continuity to the execution of some works left by my father, I put myself forward, so as to achieve this and to serve the people of my land. (Mayor, elected in 1988).

Despite these family ties and the political commitments that result from them, many women show a desire to 'assist or represent the people' or 'fight for the improvement of the municipality' as one of the main factors that led to the decision to put themselves forward as candidates for the mayoralty or the Municipal Chamber. The idea of 'care' appears as a defining aspect of many women politicians' formal political participation. According to this representation of women's political motivations, women are not in politics because they like politics, because they are interested in political practice or because of their consciousness as citizens, they are there to 'help' and to 'care':

I always wanted to help people, being a municipal councillor has given me the opportunity to help poor people and make my municipality a better place. (Female municipal councillor elected in 1992).

When I was invited to put myself forward as a candidate, I accepted because that was a way I could help my municipality and poor people. (Female municipal councillor elected in 1992).

The field of party politics continues to be without significance to these women. Their relationship with political parties is more as a help to political groups than a party political commitment. Table 4 gives an idea of why these women from small and medium municipalities in Bahia become candidates for political office.

Table 4 – Motives Given by Councillors for their Candidature

Candidate Motives	Electoral Period	
	1982/1988/1992	2008/2012
Desire to represent/help the people	37.8	37.9
Represent/help women	3.1	13.8
Improve the municipality	26.8	19
Help the party or a particular candidate	8.6	-
Replace a family member	4.7	-
Meet the request of family or friends	15.7	15.5
Other reasons	3.3	13.8
Total	100	100

Women are affiliated to political parties at the time of application but often have no ideological bond with the party. The party is still the family political group with which they are connected. This connection is primarily still with their family, the link with the party is a consequence of their link with the family group, just a legal condition for their participation in the electoral process. For these women, the party is not the channel for public opinion through which citizens can influence government decision-making as defined in the classic liberalism of John Locke, de Tocqueville and Mill. Departing from this rule are those who have links with small parties of the left, especially in the large urban centres. In the words of women councillors:

I'm in this party because it's the party in which my family works, it's like family. (Female municipal councillor elected in 1998)

This is the party in which I succeeded in becoming a legend. In my municipality, I'm the party, I'm the only councillor and because of this I have more control over the party. (Female municipal councillor elected in 2008)

I've been through several parties. When my group lost the leadership of the party we used to belong to, we had to move to this one. (Female municipal councillor elected in 2008)

Inside the party you don't have much power, what's important is the group that supports you, to whom you are connected. Sometimes you have more support in the municipality but the State directorate won't give you any support. (Female municipal councillor elected in 2008)

This fluidity of links with the party is not specific to women politicians. It is a characteristic of Brazilian political culture. The lack of a party tradition is the fruit of constant political reforms, military coups and also of

the absence of legal rules that legislate on party loyalty, which contribute to a complete disintegration of any party political perspective. If we can speak of a tradition of the Brazilian political party, it is the constant mobility and change of parties that we witness in the behaviour of Brazilian politicians. To follow the trajectory of a Brazilian politician, for example, is to follow them through diverse parties and see them change as they come to conform to new political agreements, alliances and political pacts. Women follow the same trajectory.

Twenty years ago, 40.2 per cent of the elected women municipal councillors said that they came to be affiliated with their current party because of family tradition or links that their family had with the political group of that particular party. In 2008 and 2012, the councillors pointed to ideology as the factor that determined their choice of party (51.7 per cent). However, 29.3 per cent still claim that it was for family reasons that they chose their party:

I joined this party to be a candidate and this was the party who invited me. (Female municipal councillor elected in 2008)

I was elected by the other party, but we had some problems here in the city and we had to change for the party that I am in now. (Female municipal councillor elected in 1992)

On the other hand, it is in the party where women encounter the worst obstacles, not just in terms of not recognizing their electoral potential but, especially, in terms of a lack of contribution to their campaigns, or sharing party resources with them. According to the women interviewees, the parties take no action whatsoever to engage with or approach women. What we see here is resistance to the quota system and to the

incorporation of women in the internal power structures of the party, and the lack of real commitment to women's demands. In the words of the women councillors:

The party never helped me. Inside the party, I could only count on the support of those friends who helped with my campaign. (Female municipal councillor elected in 2008)

It seemed that the party only wanted me so that they could make up the quota because after I accepted to be a candidate I didn't get any more help from them again. Inside, your campaign is your own personal cost, one you need to meet as an individual. It is you that needs to cover everything. (Female municipal councillor elected in 2008)

This political party practice in relation to women has been a vector of women's mobilization in relation to the demand for more participation in the spheres of decision-making within the party, in particular in the parties of the left. The demand for proportionality has passed from a demand for the participation of both sexes in the structures of power in the party to one for parity. These demands are being made not only from outside the political party system, by women's movements, but also from within by women who came into politics to represent women and are frustrated by the lack of opportunities that they face once elected. As one interviewee put it:

I didn't realize this before, but after a lot of activism in the party I came to see that the space was very much occupied by men, and that it was only men who were making the decisions. There comes a moment when you know that it is that a certain party has a chapter in its manifesto that refers to women, but that's very little in relation to what needs to change. If you don't have women to defend this little, it can fall by the wayside. I was encouraged [to take this up] by comrades who felt that women who were candidates didn't have much to do with women's issues... I would never put myself forward as a candidate just to defend what everyone else defends, that doesn't have any originality, it's because we needed someone there to talk, to defend, to fight, to do what could be done in parliament to change things (Female municipal councillor elected in 2008)

The Workers' Party (PT) has been one of the most innovative parties in this respect, taking up a policy of parity in their 4th National Congress of the Workers' Party, which took place in São Paulo in September 2011.* This is not to say that in the PT, or indeed in any of the other parties that have established an internal quota system, women are effectively included in the spheres of decision-making. What is common in these parties is that women become social secretaries, roles and functions with little or no share of power. In more traditional parties and those more identified with the more conservative or centrist parties, women are not even able to have this discussion, and the few who occupy positions in the party structure reproduce entirely the reigning patriarchal logic.

The relationship that political parties have with women in Brazil can be characterized as a major paradox. On the one hand, we have, on the part of the political parties, a set of practices that exclude women, boycotting their candidatures, creating barriers to women's access, disqualifying their demands and so on. On the other, no party leadership can fail to recognize the electoral potential of the female vote. Women are 51 per cent of the national electorate. In many localities, the female vote is definitive of the electoral process. It is not for nothing that the parties, independent of whether they are left or right, have in their party manifesto a number of promises in relation to women's demands, and in election campaigns, parties and candidates produce materials to disseminate their proposals and commitments in relation to women. The female vote is a treasure to be won.

The kind of support women candidates can count on comes much more from their political or family group than from the party per se.

* The 4th National Congress of the Workers' Party of September 2011 approved a quota of 50 per cent of women in the composition of their leadership, delegations, commissions and roles relating to sectoral governance. In 1991, in the 1st Congress of the Workers' Party, a minimum quota of 30 per cent for women's participation in all levels of party governance was approved.

Table 5 – Role of the Political Party in the Election of Female Municipal Councillors

Role of Party	Electoral Period	
	1982/1998/1992	2008/2012
Helped	62.5	46.6
Made things more difficult	8.4	12.1
Remained neutral (indifferent)	29.1	32.7
Vague answer	-	5.2
No response	-	3.4
Total	100	100

One important piece of data in the table above that should be taken into account is the high percentage of councillors who believed that their party ‘remained neutral’ that is, had no importance in the electoral process and brought no contribution or influence for their election. That this remains relatively unchanged over the cohorts of councillors from 1982 to 2012 confirms that for them:

In the municipality, what matters is the candidate, their family and not the party. Voting is personal, based on commitments, alliances. It is a kind of recognition of the work done previously by the candidate or political group or family to whom they are linked. (Female municipal councillor elected in 1992)

The party does not go as far as the small municipality. At the time of campaigning you have to fend for yourself. The state leadership only remembers the party in the

municipality at the time of elections for [federal or state] deputies. (Female municipal councillor elected in 2008)

This perspective of distance in relation to the party is reinforced not only in the vision that female municipal councillors have of what the party does in the municipality but also in the very practices developed in the party in relation to women. In the table below, we can see how female municipal councillors evaluate the attitude of the party in relation to the demands and interests of women. The predominant opinion is that the party does nothing to attract women, although it must be noted that this is lower amongst those female municipal councillors elected more recently. It might also be noted that the proportion of respondents who saw their party as providing encouragement and support for female candidates remains virtually unchanged throughout the 30 year period, at just over a quarter of respondents.

Table 6 – Attitude of the Party in Relation to Women

Attitude of the Party	Electoral Period	
	1982/1988/1992	2008/2012
Does nothing to attract women	49.5	32.8
Motivates and supports female candidates	25.3	25.9
Promotes political training for women	-	12.1
Is only active in election periods	17.7	-
Other responses	7.5	12
Did not respond		5.2
Don't know		12
Total	100	100

In the words of the women councillors:

In my municipality, the Party does nothing to help women. It seems that in Salvador the party held an event. (Female municipal councillor elected in 2008)

From time to time there are events in Brasilia to bring together women of the party but in the municipality there aren't those kinds of things. The party does

nothing here. (Female municipal councillor elected in 1988)

In the elections there's always someone there from the state leadership, principally when there are elections for Deputy, but outside that it's abandonment. The party doesn't help, doesn't support, doesn't prepare the women [for election]. (Female municipal councillor elected in 1992)

I've never heard of any activity carried out by the party to help women. For us, everything is always very difficult. Not only to come out as a candidate but to succeed in making a campaign, and after being elected we continue alone, lacking support. (Female municipal councillor elected in 2008)

This 'abandonment' by the party means that the period of electoral campaigning is very difficult for women. The lack of their own financial resources along with the high cost of election campaigns today in Brazil makes it virtually unviable for women to put themselves forward as candidates for election.

A significant example in this context is the trajectory of Creuza Maria Oliveira, President of the National Federation of Domestic Workers (FENATRAD), whose long-standing activism in leading the organization of domestic workers in Brazil has earned her national and international recognition. In 2011, Creuza received the National Human Rights prize, the highest award of the Brazilian government. Also an activist in the Unified Black Movement, Creuza is affiliated with the Workers' Party and has run as candidate for state deputy in Bahia and three times for municipal councillor for the municipality of Salvador. Despite the prestige she has won nationally, on none of these occasions has Creuza been elected. According to her:

I come from a political trajectory linked to the struggles for recognition of the category of domestic workers, I have participated in diverse social movements, but I haven't got resources to finance my campaign, the party hasn't helped me, the big businessmen don't usually finance the campaigns of women and, worse still, of a domestic worker. The small individual contributions that I get are just not enough to ensure the minimum materials I need for the campaign. They're not enough for me to compete with the power of those who have the money to bankroll their campaigns or who have weighty supporters.

In smaller cities where the cost of campaigning is lower, women confront other obstacles. Even those who have their own resources do not apply them to their campaigns. Studies show that women are not in the habit of mortgaging their goods to finance their electoral campaigns. This is a practice common amongst men. Women candidates do not want to risk any of their property, or that of their family. This way of thinking

contributes further to the exclusion of women from power.

Conclusion

Women in Brazil experience numerous obstacles in their pathways to political power. In order to overcome these barriers, the Brazilian women's movement has sought to create mechanisms to transform this reality, to improve the quota law and with this a guaranteed allocation of financial resources from party funds as well as access to free party political advertising. The women's movement is, however, well aware that financing mechanisms alone are not enough to transform mentalities. To address this, women's organizations and the state have created training programmes for women and a national campaign 'More women in power' has been developed and co-ordinated by the National Secretariat for Women's Policies (*Secretaria Nacional de Políticas para Mulheres*, SPM), an organ with the status of a ministry linked to the presidency of the republic. SPM represents an important ally in the battle for the incorporation of women in Brazilian politics. Another example has been the Women and Democracy Programme which co-ordinates various organizations across the north and north-east of the country to constitute a network of professionalized women across the region who carry out political training for women and encourage women's candidature.

For all this, the effective and equal participation of women in decision-making in Brazil has a long way yet to go. If we take as our parameters the indices of growth in participation of women in electoral office in the last 30 years, we would reach the conclusion that another 50 years are needed for women to win parity in representation in Brazilian society. Improving the quota system and guaranteeing its effective implementation is an important step on this pathway, but it is not the only one. The quota system in and of itself does not create the conditions for the political empowerment of women. It needs to be accompanied by public policies that promote equality and that can create the conditions for more radical changes in the patriarchal structures of society as an essential part of what it means to deepen democracy.

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