

From Descriptive to Substantive Representation of Women in Times of Crisis-The Case of Latin American Countries*

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Abstract

We aim to reinforce the existing research by providing further evidence that an increase in the proportion of women in governing positions can contribute to an increase in the representation of women's interests. For this, we use the November 2021 version of the COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker Policy Measures Dataset, which compiles all policies implemented by governments to tackle the crisis for the period between January 4, 2020, and October 5, 2021. We conduct regression analysis using ordinary least squares and two-stage least squares models for 179 countries. We find that an increase in female political participation resulted in a greater number of gender-sensitive policies being introduced during this period. This effect was especially pronounced in Latin America and the Caribbean, although significant intra-regional variations were observed. We further conducted a brief study of Argentina and Cuba to elucidate the potential factors influencing their diverging policy outcomes. Overall, this study highlights the positive impact of women's descriptive representation in bringing a gender perspective to policymaking, particularly in times of crisis, and emphasizes their significant contribution to gender equality in developing countries.

Key words

Descriptive representation, substantive representation, women in parliament, gender-sensitive policies, Latin America

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Introduction

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has presented a challenge to all countries, causing numerous casualties worldwide. However, countries vary in their ability to control the virus and address the socio-economic vulnerabilities caused by social distancing measures. A UN policy brief (2020) showed that women and girls were disproportionately affected by the pandemic, leading to heightened economic and health inequalities, an increase in unpaid care for women, and an increase in violence against women. This highlights the necessity of incorporating a gender perspective into policymaking during times of crisis to address these vulnerabilities.

In recent decades, countries have shown a gradual expansion in the number of women in their national parliaments (World Bank, 2022). In turn, we attempt to determine whether this increase in female representation has resulted in greater gender sensitivity in policymaking or, in other words, an increase in the substantive representation of women. The aim of this study was to reinforce the existing body of research by providing further evidence that descriptive representation can, in fact, contribute to an increase in the representation of the interests of marginalized groups, in this case, women. We do this by conducting a study that examines the gender-sensitive policy responses introduced in 179 countries using the UNDP and UN Women's COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker Policy Measures dataset. This study investigated the relationship between these policies and the proportion of women holding parliamentary positions by conducting regression analysis using ordinary least squares (OLS) and two-stage least squares (2SLS) models.

Based on the findings of our empirical research, we expanded our analysis to Latin America, which has been severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The region's weak socio-economic situation has worsened, with a drastic 9.1% contraction in GDP in 2020 and rising poverty levels (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), 2020). With over 60% of the population engaged in informal work, the region struggled to contain the virus through social distancing measures (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), 2020). Women, who comprise a high proportion of informal workers in Latin America, were categorized as one of the most vulnerable populations during the pandemic, according to the Pan American Health Organization. We further investigated the impact of female parliamentary representation, which is notably high in Latin American countries, on the im-

plementation of gender-sensitive policies in these nations. We contribute to the existing literature by elaborating on the descriptive and substantive representation nexus of women during the COVID-19 pandemic, using a dataset that includes context-specific policy measures for numerous countries. Additionally, our findings on Latin America and the Caribbean provide new grounds for further research on the role of female leaders in promoting gender equality.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. We begin with a literature review of prior research on female political participation and the implementation of gender-specific policies, along with an overview of relevant studies conducted in the Latin American region. Subsequently, we provide details about the dataset and variables employed in our research, followed by an explanation of the analytical framework. We then present the empirical results derived from our regression analyses and discuss the findings both in a general context and with a specific focus on Latin America.

Descriptive and Substantive Representation Nexus

A longstanding political debate revolves around the significance of descriptive representation and its effects on substantive representation (Phillips, 1995; Young, 2000). Phillips (1998) has been a prominent advocate of “descriptive representation,” which emphasizes the importance of examining “who” individuals in parliamentary positions are and “how” their demographic characteristics resemble that of the voters. She emphasized the importance of this resemblance, particularly concerning marginalized groups, as she believes that this may play a crucial role in representing their interests effectively. In addition, Pitkin (1967) stressed the need to observe “what” it is that representatives do and what policies they introduce instead of focusing too much on “who” they are and “who” they represent. She has defined “substantive representation” as the actions where the representative “acts in the interest of the represented, in a manner responsive to them” (Pitkin, 1967). From a more issue-specific perspective, Mansbridge (1999) laid out several reasons why disadvantaged groups (in this case, people of color and women) should be represented by politicians with the same demographic characteristics. However, she ultimately agreed with the stance that a balance should be achieved between substantive and descriptive representation and that overemphasizing the latter can be problematic. An agreement is yet to be reached regarding which is more effective or whether descriptive representation positively affects substantive representation. In the following section, we introduce previous studies that have attempted to de-

cipher the aforementioned puzzle, focusing on the role that female politicians play as both descriptive and substantive representatives of women.

Do Women Represent Women?

Many attempts have been made to answer the question of whether descriptive representation have any effect on substantive representation. Studies have explored the differences between the priorities and preferences of female and male politicians when introducing domestic policies (Davis, 1997; Lloren & Rosset, 2017). These studies argue that female politicians tend to support policies that are softer¹ in nature (Swigonski, 1994). O'Brien and Piscopo (2019) contributed to the literature by advocating for increased political interest in women's issues and policies for vulnerable populations. Chen (2013) found mixed evidence in her study of Taiwanese female politicians, with female mayors contributing a higher portion of the budget to social welfare and female council women doing the opposite. Chattopadhyay and Duflo (2001) drew similar results in their study of India, with female politicians investing more in public goods relevant to women and male politicians doing the opposite.

The interaction between female policymakers and policy outcomes has been a subject of interest for many scholars. The results vary, with some finding a positive correlation between women in politics and policy implementation, whereas others find no such correlation. Gago and Carozzi (2020) did not find any indication that female politicians in Spanish municipalities were more actively engaged in the implementation of gender-sensitive policies. Instead, their research reveals that right-wing political leaders exert a negative influence on the adoption of gender-specific policies. In a paper published in 2023, these scholars provided supporting evidence for their previous findings that the gender of political leaders matters less than their political ideology in implementing gender-sensitive policies (Carozzi & Gago, 2023).

By contrast, Jovani, Subono, and Suyanto (2020) found that female legislative members in East Nusa Tenggara introduced more gender-responsive policies and allocated more budgets for gender issues. Costa, Sawer, and Sharp (2013) concluded that increased representation of women in parliament in Timor-Leste was crucial for passing a resolution on gender-responsive budgeting. Wang (2013)

¹ According to Swigonski (1994), these "soft" policies have been those centered in health and social welfare.

demonstrated the positive effect of women in the Ugandan parliament on the passage of the Domestic Violence Act in 2010, promoting gender equality. This contrasts with the experiences of other African countries, where no positive correlation has been found between women in parliament and policy output (Devlin & Elgie, 2008).

Other studies examined the role of female leaders in the health sector. Female representation is crucial to reduce gender bias and discrimination in healthcare. Bhalotra and Clots-Figueras (2014) found a causal relationship between female political representation and neonatal survival, assuming that female leaders were more likely to promote infant health-related policies. In a set of randomized trials, Downs, Reif, Hokororo, and Fitzgerald (2014) showed that female leaders implemented different policies, focusing on children and women. Coscieme et al. (2020) found that during the COVID-19 crisis, countries led by female leaders performed better in terms of total deaths and daily peaks, attributing their success to leaders' focus on social equality, human needs, and generosity. However, Windsor et al. (2020) found little evidence of COVID-19 fatality differences between countries led by female and male leaders.

Another body of research has delved deeply into how descriptive representation affects the interests of those being represented, either positively or negatively. Studies on women and politics in Latin America have found that numbers alone are not sufficient to guarantee gender-sensitive policies (Peschard, 2003; Sacchet, 2008). Sacchet (2008) argued that female political coordination, rather than the number of women in parliament, is crucial for the high representation of women in Brazil's national policies². Peschard (2003) emphasized the need for a large number of female politicians accompanied by a more equal social environment in terms of female and male education, healthcare, and employment. Zetterberg (2009) criticized gender quotas for disempowering women because of factors that limit their actions in parliament.

Alternatively, Piscopo (2014), using critical mass theory³, found that an increase

² The author gives the example of the campaign "Women Without Fear of Power" as having had the most impact in Brazilian politics, which has been composed of women from institutional, voluntary, and civil society sectors.

³ Critical Mass Theory: Marwell and Oliver (1993) defined this theory as the interdependent decisions that, when accumulated into collective actions, tend to focus on a common goal. In this sense, we are using critical mass theory as the increase in the absolute number of female politicians through the quota system to achieve the common goal of gendered policies.

in the absolute number of female politicians had an impact on promoting gender-friendly policies. This is due to the fact that women have traditionally been a marginalized group, which influences the policymaking process (O'Brien & Piscopa, 2019). Jones (1996) argued that the gender of political representatives affects policies related to women's rights, family issues, and children's issues in Argentina. Cunial (2021) also provided new evidence linking an increase in female political participation to a reduction in the infant mortality rate in Argentina. This study aimed to contribute to the existing body of literature on the effect of the descriptive representation of women in increasing their substantive representation by examining the gender-sensitive policies introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Analytical Framework and Data

This study attempts to understand the relationship between descriptive and substantive representation of women by examining the proportion of females participating in politics and its effects on policy outcomes. In particular, their participation has contributed to gender-sensitive measures in the context of the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic. During the first year since COVID-19 was first introduced, studies have found the negative impacts that this pandemic has had on women, especially in terms of economic impact, health, unpaid work, and violence against women and girls (VAWG) during lockdowns (Azcona et al., 2020). In this regard, we propose the following basic argument. Due to the negative side effects of COVID-19 on women, countries that have more women in parliament—descriptive representation—tend to introduce more gender-sensitive policies—substantive representation.

For this research, we used cross-sectional data retrieved from the UNDP and UN Women's COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker Policy Measures Dataset, updated on November 11, 2021. The analyzed period ranged from January 4, 2020, to October 5, 2021, during the pandemic. The dataset includes policies from 224 countries. However, this study draws upon 179 country observations for its analysis, with 45 countries excluded either because of insufficient data availability or the absence of gender-sensitive policies within those countries.

The dataset compiles COVID-19 response policies in the areas of economic and financial support, the labor market, social protection, and violence against women. Of the 4,968 policies, 1,605 were classified as gender sensitive, meaning that they directly target women's needs, such as economic security, unpaid care,

Table 1
Data Summary

	Total	Targeting women's economic security	Directly supporting unpaid care	Violence against women	Gender sensitive
Economic, financial, and fiscal support for businesses and entrepreneurs	1,016	146	0	0	146
Labor market	876	130	28	0	158
Social protection	2,223	250	198	0	448
Violence against women	853	0	0	853	853
Total	4,968	526	226	853	1,605

Source: UNDP-UN Women COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker Policy Measures Dataset (2021)

Note. The following sections abbreviate this subcategory as “Business and Entrepreneurs” and “business” to refer to policies supporting female-led businesses and entrepreneurs.

and protection from physical violence (Table 1).

Table 1 summarizes the non-gendered and gender-sensitive policies in the COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker Policy Measures Dataset. Of the 4,968 policies, 17% were gender sensitive, with the largest share being violence against women. Notably, 20% of the social protection policies and 14% of the economic support policies were gender sensitive.

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics for the number of policies introduced by each of the 179 countries. Gender-sensitive policies were further categorized into the following subcategories: business and entrepreneurs, labor market, social protection, VAWG, women’s economic security, and policies directly supporting un-

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics

Variables	Obs.	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Gender-Sensitive Policies	179	8.64	6.32	1	36
Business and Entrepreneurs	179	0.78	1.08	0	6
Labor Market Policies	179	0.84	1.54	0	9
Social Protection Policies	179	2.37	2.36	0	16
Violence Against Women and Girls	179	4.65	3.81	0	14
Targeting Women’s Economic Security	179	2.79	3.04	0	20
Supporting Unpaid Care	179	1.20	1.77	0	11

paid care. The main dependent variables in this study are the total number of gender-sensitive policies and their subcategories, as the aim is to examine which countries have implemented the most gender-sensitive policies.

On average, these countries have introduced 8.64 gender-sensitive policies (Table 2). However, there is a large variation in the number of gender-sensitive policies among countries, with some countries having only one, whereas another country (Argentina) has 36. The standard deviation was 6.32. For each of the policy categories, business, labor market, social protection, and VAWG—the average number of policies introduced was 0.78, 0.84, 2.37, and 4.65, respectively—with the highest being for policies targeting VAWG. However, there was more variation among countries in terms of policy implementation than in the other three categories.

Our main independent variable was the proportion of seats held by women in national parliament. Data for this variable were obtained from the World Bank database for the latest year available for the countries of interest. According to the World Bank, this variable is the percentage of parliamentary seats held by women within a single chamber or lower. We found large variations in the main independent variables for the countries in our sample. The standard deviation for the proportion of women in national parliaments is 12.26. While there are three countries with no women in their national parliaments—Micronesia, Papua New Guinea, and Vanuatu—on the opposite pole, Rwanda has up to 61.25%.

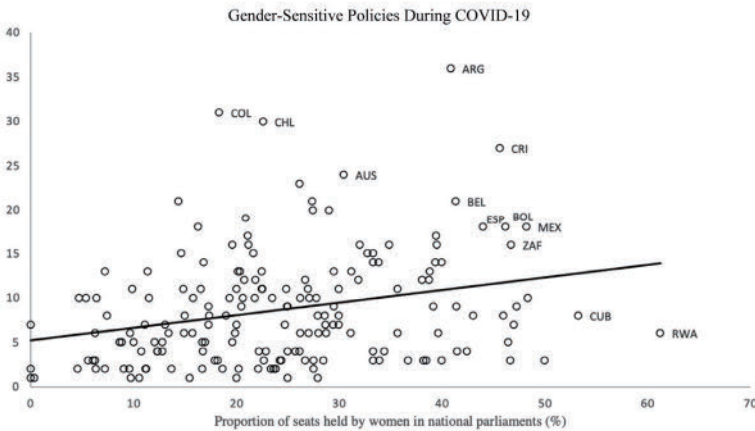


Figure 1. Correlation between proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments (%) and gender-sensitive policies introduced during COVID-19.

Figure 1 shows the relationship between the percentage of women in the national parliament and the total number of gender-sensitive policies introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic. We observed a positive correlation between these two variables. For this study, we have added the labels of countries with both high gender-sensitive policies and a high proportion of women participating in politics (Argentina, Costa Rica, South Africa, Belgium, Bolivia, Mexico, and Spain, among others), which are located on the upper right side of the scatter plot. Additionally, we labeled those with a high number of gender-sensitive policies introduced but with low female political participation (Chile and Colombia). In the case of Rwanda and Cuba, we observed a high proportion of seats held by women in parliament, yet these two countries failed to introduce a significant number of gender-sensitive policies during the period analyzed. Interestingly, these findings illustrate the variation that exists within Latin America, either supporting or contradicting our hypotheses. The results of these preliminary findings will be briefly addressed in the following sections to provide the groundwork for further research on the causal relationship between women in parliament and gender sensitivity in policymaking.

Figure 2 shows the relationship between the proportion of women in national parliaments and the number of gender-sensitive policies in the following sub-categories: business and entrepreneurs, labor market, social VAWG, and policies dealing with women's economic security and unpaid care. The countries in our sample vary in the number and type of policies introduced. However, the findings show a positive and significant correlation for all categories, except for policies destined for businesses and entrepreneurs, which show a negative correlation. These preliminary results suggest that countries with a high proportion of women in parliament have, in fact, introduced a high number of policies in the areas of labor market, social protection, VAWG, and unpaid care during the period studied.

Empirical Model and Results

To examine the relationship between the proportion of female politicians and the number of gender-sensitive policies implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic, we conducted regression analysis using OLS and 2SLS models. Our sample consists of 179 countries from the UNDP-UN Women's COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker Policy Measures dataset. Eq. (1) illustrates the main model for the OLS estimation as follows:

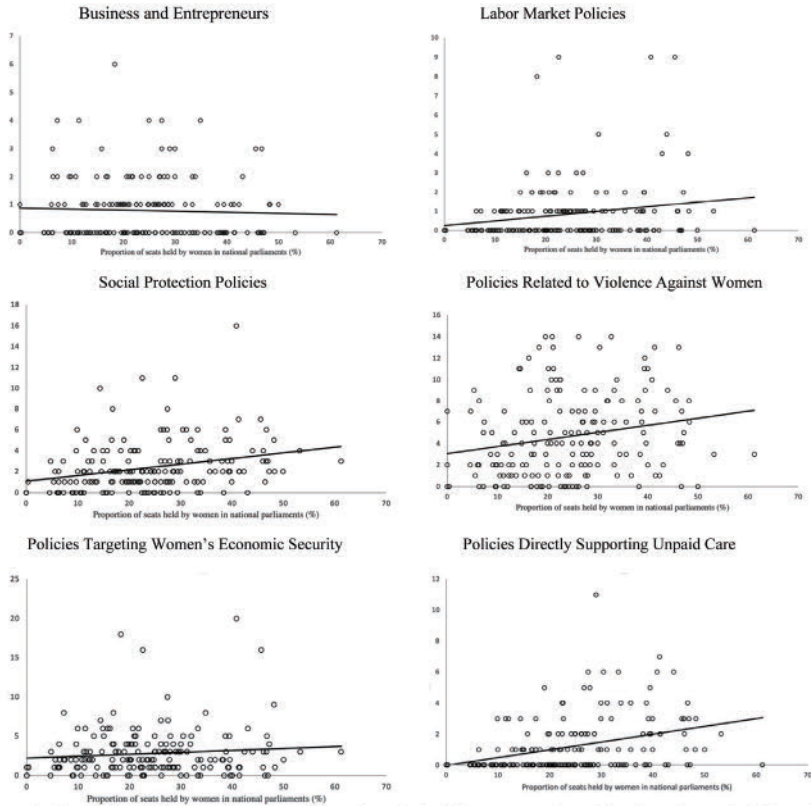


Figure 2. Correlation between the proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments (%) and the subcategories

$$\begin{aligned}
 \text{Gender Sensitive Policies} = & \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 \text{Women in Parliament} + \\
 & \alpha_2 \text{Female Leader} + \text{CONTROLS}
 \end{aligned}
 \tag{1}$$

Where *Gender-Sensitive Policies* is the number of gender-sensitive policies of each country in our sample, *Women in Parliament* is the proportion of women in parliament, *Female Leader* is a dummy variable indicating whether a female leader is in power at the time of the research, and *CONTROLS* is a set of control variables. The control variables used are log of gross domestic product per capita (GDPPC), Total Policies, Global Freedom Score, and a Latin American dummy variable defined as Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) in our regressions. The female

leader dummy had a value of “1” if the country was led by a female president or prime minister and “0” if not. Data on GDPPC were obtained from the World Development Indicators for the latest available years. The total policy variable was calculated by subtracting the gender-sensitive policies of each country from the total number of policies introduced. The Latin American dummy, which included 32 countries⁴ in the region, had a value of “1” if the country was in the Latin American and Caribbean region and “0” otherwise.

The Global Freedom Score, which is presented in the annual report by Freedom House, assesses the political and civil liberties of all individuals, including minority groups such as the LGBT+ community, women, and ethnic minorities. This measure goes beyond the analysis of political aspects and includes specific features of political participation and human rights. It provides a more comprehensive view of individual rights and freedoms than the Global Gender Gap index proposed by the World Economic Forum, which focuses only on economic, political, health, and educational aspects of gender inequality.

To address the issue of possible endogeneity in our cross-sectional regression, we utilized a 2SLS regression model and employed the gender quota as an instrumental variable (IV), shown in Eq. (2), which illustrates the first stage of the 2SLS. Gender quota data were obtained from the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance website’s gender quota database. This instrumental variable examines whether a country has implemented a gender quota in its parliament. If a country has implemented a gender quota, the variable takes the value of “1,” and “0” if it has not. Gender quota is a suitable instrumental variable for our analysis because it satisfies three main properties: first, it is not included in our main regression model; second, women in parliament and the gender quota are positively and significantly correlated; and third, the instrumental variable is not correlated with the error term in our original regression.

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Women in Parliament} = & \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 \text{Gender Quota} + \\ & \alpha_2 \text{Female Leader} + \text{CONTROLS} \end{aligned} \quad (2)$$

⁴ These 32 countries are Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, Uruguay, and Venezuela.

Table 3 presents the regression analysis results. In Column 1, we examine the relationship between the number of gender-sensitive policies and the proportion of women in parliament while controlling for the log of GDP per capita and the total number of non-gendered policies. Our findings show that the percentage of women in national parliaments had a positive and statistically significant impact (0.109, $p < 0.01$) on the number of gender-sensitive policies introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic. This aligns with previous research, which suggests that a higher representation of women in parliament leads to greater consideration of gender issues and the enactment of new laws that better address women's needs and rights. During the COVID-19 pandemic, women politicians may have brought unique perspectives on gender issues, and their presence has helped raise awareness and increase public discourse on these matters. Consequently, laws that protect women and address gender-based violence, discrimination, and other issues affecting women during the pandemic are likely to be enacted. In Column 3, we al-

Table 3
Determinants of Gender-Sensitive Policies

	Dependent Variable: Gender Sensitive Policies							
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
	OLS	IV	OLS	IV	OLS	IV	OLS	IV
Women in Parliament	0.109*** (0.033)	0.238** (0.106)	0.108*** (0.033)	0.243*** (0.111)	0.11*** (0.033)	0.228** (0.107)	0.093*** (0.032)	0.261*** (0.101)
log GDPPC	-0.34 (0.307)	-0.589 (0.372)	-0.341 (0.308)	-0.588 (0.372)	-0.795** (0.356)	-1.028** (0.416)	-0.714** (0.346)	-1.059** (0.414)
Total Policies	0.299*** (0.037)	0.293*** (0.038)	0.299*** (0.037)	0.293*** (0.038)	0.297*** (0.036)	0.292*** (0.037)	0.293*** (0.035)	0.287*** (0.037)
Female Leader			0.202 (1.174)	-0.604 (1.366)	-0.086 (1.164)	-0.799 (1.338)	0.502 (1.139)	-0.63 (1.363)
Global Freedom Index					0.038** (0.016)	0.04** (0.016)	0.028* (0.016)	0.032* (0.017)
LAC							3.56*** (1.001)	2.743*** (1.154)
_cons	3.857 (2.442)	2.994 (2.609)	3.867 (2.449)	2.954 (2.626)	5.533** (2.511)	4.803* (2.636)	5.251** (2.432)	4.295 (2.625)
Observations	179	179	179	179	179	179	179	179
R-squared	.346	.286	.346	.283	.367	.32	.411	.316

Note. t statistics in parentheses

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

so included the Female Leader dummy, expecting female leaders to introduce more gender-sensitive policies. However, our results indicate that female presidents or prime ministers did not significantly influence the introduction of gender-sensitive policies during the pandemic.

Additionally, our findings indicate a negative correlation between a country's GDP per capita and the introduction of gender-sensitive policies during the COVID-19 pandemic. This may suggest that higher-income countries had less need to address the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on women through specific laws and policies or that the negative impact on women was less severe in these countries. The coefficient of Total Policies shows that countries that introduced a higher number of policies during the COVID-19 pandemic also introduced more gender-sensitive policies.

Column (5) shows the Global Freedom Index, which gauges the degree of civil liberties and political rights in each country. These results indicate that countries with higher degrees of freedom have introduced more gender-sensitive policies. This could be due to increased pressure on policymakers to implement such policies from citizens participating in the political process or media. Despite controlling for this variable, the proportion of women in parliament still had a significant impact on the number of gender-sensitive policies introduced.

In Column (7), we added a dummy for the LAC. After conducting separate regressions for all seven regional classifications⁵, we found that only Latin American countries showed significant results. This region introduced 3.56 more gender-sensitive policies, which will be discussed in later sections. All four OLS regressions showed that the total number of non-gender-sensitive policies was significant at the 1% level.

The results of the 2SLS regression models using gender quota as an instrumental variable are reported in Columns (2), (4), (6), and (8). Comparing Columns (1) and (2), we observe that the coefficient of the percentage of women in parliament increases from 0.109 to 0.238 when we use the 2SLS. Despite being less significant than in the OLS regression, the coefficient is larger. This result remained even when other explanatory and control variables were included. Our findings, using the IV-2SLS method, suggest that the percentage of women in parliament has a significant impact on the number of gender-sensitive policies in-

⁵ The seven regional classifications put forth by the World Bank are East Asia and Pacific, Europe and Central Asia, Latin America and Caribbean, Middle East and North Africa, North America, South Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa.

Table 4
Determinants of Policies by Subcategory

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Economic	Labor	Social	VAWG	Security	Unpaid Care
Women in Parliament	-0.003 (-0.53)	0.020* (2.25)	0.042** (3.30)	0.051* (2.37)	0.028 (1.58)	0.031*** (3.88)
log GDPPC	-0.161* (-2.24)	-0.121 (-1.20)	-0.0773 (-0.54)	-0.435 (-1.84)	-0.602** (-3.04)	0.243** (2.75)
Total Policies	0.033*** (4.48)	0.043*** (4.22)	0.088*** (6.00)	0.133*** (5.49)	0.103*** (5.08)	0.061*** (6.71)
Global Freedom Index	-0.001 (-0.39)	0.006 (1.24)	0.006 (0.91)	0.028** (2.72)	-0.002 (-0.18)	0.012** (2.96)
_cons	1.775*** (3.50)	0.325 (0.46)	0.180 (0.18)	3.252 (1.95)	5.691*** (4.07)	-3.412*** (-5.46)
N	179	179	179	179	179	179

Note. t statistics in parentheses

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

roduced by the country during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, OLS estimation may underestimate the actual effect.

Table 4 presents the results of the regression analyses for the subcategories of gender-sensitive policies introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic. The impact of women in parliament on gender-sensitive policies varies across subcategories. Women in parliament have a positive and significant effect on the introduction of policies in the categories of labor market, social protection, violence against women, and unpaid care, which is expected, as women were disproportionately affected in these areas. However, the impact of women in parliament on economic security was not significant, even though the coefficient had the right sign.

In the case of business and entrepreneurial policies, the coefficient was negative and not significant. This may be due to the fact that most business and entrepreneur-related policies were gender-neutral, as COVID-19 had a similar impact on both men and women in business.

The Global Freedom Index had positive and significant effects only in the categories of violence against women and unpaid care. This may be because citizens with greater civil liberties and political rights aim to protect the most vulnerable individuals in society. The coefficient of GDP per capita was negative for all categories. As previously stated, this could be due to the fact that countries with higher GDP per capita had less urgency to address the unequal effects of the pan-

Table 5
Determinants of Policies by Subcategory with LAC Dummy

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Economic	Labor	Social	VAWG	Security	Unpaid Care
Women in Parliament	-0.004 (-0.59)	0.016 (1.80)	0.040** (3.08)	0.044* (2.05)	0.017 (0.99)	0.035*** (4.52)
log GDPPC	-0.159* (-2.20)	-0.098 (-1.01)	-0.064 (-0.45)	-0.400 (-1.71)	-0.544** (-2.94)	0.223** (2.62)
Total Policies	0.033*** (4.45)	0.042*** (4.26)	0.087*** (5.98)	0.131*** (5.49)	0.100*** (5.28)	0.062*** (7.11)
Global Freedom Index	-0.002 (-0.47)	0.003 (0.58)	0.004 (0.62)	0.024* (2.27)	-0.009 (-1.12)	0.014*** (3.72)
LAC	0.101 (0.49)	1.086*** (3.91)	0.639 (1.57)	1.670* (2.50)	2.788*** (5.25)	-0.962*** (-3.93)
_cons	1.767*** (3.48)	0.241 (0.35)	0.130 (0.13)	3.123 (1.90)	5.476*** (4.20)	-3.337*** (-5.56)
N	179	179	179	179	179	179

Note. t statistics in parentheses

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

demic on women through legislation and policies or that the pandemic had a less severe impact on women in these countries.

In Table 5, when we introduce the Latin American dummy variable into the previous regressions, we observe the following results: The Latin American dummy variable was positive and significant in most cases. However, for unpaid care, the coefficient of the Latin American dummy variable was negative. The coefficients of the other variables did not change significantly with the inclusion of this variable. We can conclude that given equal conditions, Latin American countries introduced more gender-sensitive policies in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Case of Latin America

The results of the empirical analysis showed that countries with a high proportion of women in parliament introduced more gender-sensitive policies during the pandemic. This finding supports the idea that a higher representation of women in parliament leads to greater consideration of gender issues and the implementation of laws that better address women's needs and rights. Furthermore,

it was observed that Latin American countries introduced a larger number of gender-sensitive policies than other regions, which may be due to a more severe or disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on women in the region or a lack of institutional preparedness.

The regression models for specific policy categories indicate that after controlling for other factors, Latin American countries have adopted more gender-sensitive policies in the areas of the labor market, violence against women, and women's economic security. However, few policies directly supporting unpaid care have been introduced. This highlights the complexity and variability of gender-sensitive policy responses during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The high number of gender-sensitive policies in the labor market and women's economic security may be due to the disproportionate loss of jobs and income experienced by women in Latin America during the pandemic. According to a report published by the United Nations ECLAC, the pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on women's employment in the region, as women are over-represented in industries such as tourism and hospitality that were severely affected. This has led to greater job losses and income insecurity among women. Furthermore, the increase in unpaid care work within households because of social distancing measures has added to the burden on women and had a negative impact on their participation in the labor force (OECD, 2020).

The large number of policies related to violence against women in this region may be partly attributable to the high number of domestic workers. Domestic workers often have limited access to resources and support networks, particularly during a pandemic. They may also have limited legal protection and may be afraid to report abuse for fear of losing their jobs or facing retaliation (ECLAC, 2020). Power imbalances in employer–employee relationships also make it difficult for domestic workers to assert their rights and escape abusive situations, making them more vulnerable to domestic violence. Therefore, laws and policies have been implemented to protect women from violence.

The low number of policies supporting unpaid care work may be due to the traditional view that care work, such as cooking, cleaning, and caring for children and elderly relatives, is a private and personal responsibility rather than a public issue. This has limited the recognition of the importance of unpaid care and the need for policies to support it. In many Latin American countries, traditional gender norms assign women a primary role in care work, perpetuating the idea that it is not a public issue requiring policy intervention.

As shown in Figure 3, the results of the regression analysis indicate that most

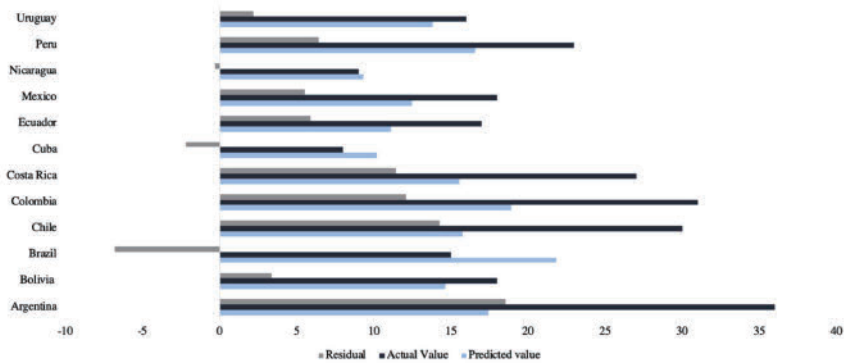


Figure 3. Regression results of LAC countries by number of gender-sensitive policies introduced.

Latin American countries fit the model reasonably well; however, there are two deviations: Argentina and Cuba. Although both countries have a high proportion of women in national parliaments (40.9% in Argentina and 53.2% in Cuba), Argentina has introduced a greater number of gender-sensitive policies in comparison to other neighboring countries and the total samples analyzed. However, despite having the highest proportion of women in national parliaments, Cuba has implemented only eight gender-sensitive policies. The following section offers potential, but not definitive, explanations for this deviation from the regression model's predictions for the two countries.

Argentina

The higher proportion of women in parliament and the Global Freedom Index score contributed positively to the introduction of gender-sensitive policies in Argentina. Based on the results of our analysis, Argentina is a country in which the descriptive representation of women has increased substantially. However, these variables alone do not fully explain the large number of gender-sensitive policies in the country. Additional factors may play important roles.

In 1991, Argentina became the first country to introduce the National Electoral Quota (Law 24.012), with strong support from then-President Carlos Menem (Craske, 1999). This quota law was the first of its kind in Latin America and led other countries to follow. The *Ley de Cupos* (Law of Quotas) increased female political participation from an average of 4% in 1983-1991 to 28% in 1995. This law played a significant role in increasing women's political representation by mandat-

ing that a minimum of 30% of women be elected and placed in electable positions (Jones & Navia, 1999). However, some scholars have criticized the impact of increased representation on overall society and the implementation of gender-sensitive policies in the region (Peschard, 2003; Sacchet, 2008; Zetterberg, 2009).

The increase in female representation in Argentina's politics can be attributed to several factors, including the gender quota law (Jones & Navia, 1999). According to Jones and Navia (1999), the closed-list system and a mandate for women elected to be placed in "electable" positions, not just "ornamental positions," helped increase female representation. Additionally, the collective action of women's groups in Argentina, such as the National Women's Council and the President's Cabinet of Women Advisors, is said to have had a positive impact on women's political representation (Jones & Navia, 1999).

Another significant event that has driven the women's rights movement in Argentina was the murder of 14-year-old Chiara Páez, who was pregnant at the time and was killed by her boyfriend. The *Ni Una Menos* (Not One Less) movement was formed after her death and placed gender issues at the forefront of Argentine politics. This movement, which initially aimed to address the issue of femicides in the region, expanded to encompass reproductive health and rights. It is credited with contributing to the Senate's passing of the Voluntary Interruption of Pregnancy Bill in 2020.

Cuba

The actual number of gender-sensitive policies introduced in Cuba was far lower than that predicted by the regression model. The proportion of women in parliament is a contributing factor; however, other factors seem to negatively affect the substantive representation of women in Cuba.

Although Cuba does not have a gender quota law, women still have high political representation, with 53% of parliamentary seats held by women. However, high representation does not necessarily lead to increased female empowerment. Luciak (2005) argued that a glass ceiling exists for women rising to key positions of power, such as the Council of States.

The lack of political participation by women in Cuba compared to Argentina may be due to the absence of legislation or institutions that specifically empower women in politics or the political system itself. Cultural factors, such as patriarchal values and the traditional role of women as caretakers, have also been cited as obstacles to women's political participation. The National Survey for Gender

Equality in 2016 found that women in Cuba continue to perform most of their domestic work and care for children and family members. Luciak (2005) found that this high level of domestic work reduced women's participation in politics due to the time constraints involved. This situation was exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially for women in rural areas and specific ethnic groups (Maqueira & Torres, 2021). The example of Cuba clearly shows that the capacity required to increase the substantive representation of women varies significantly by country and region, making it difficult to generalize a sole strategy that will be beneficial for enhancing women's power.

Conclusions

Numerous attempts have been made to explain the relationship between descriptive and substantive representation of gender issues (Bhalotra & Clots-Figuieras, 2014; Costa et al., 2013; Davis, 1997; Devlin & Elgie, 2008; Lloren & Rosset, 2017; Wang, 2013). This study attempted to add to the existing body of literature by examining the relationship between the descriptive representation of women and the effect this had on their substantive representation during the COVID-19 pandemic. We used data from the UNDP's COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker Policy Measures Dataset. The findings suggest that a higher representation of women in parliament led to an increase in gender-sensitive policies enacted during the pandemic. This can be attributed to women politicians bringing unique perspectives on gender issues, raising awareness, and sparking public discourse. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the presence of women in parliament helped ensure that laws were enacted to protect women and address gender-based violence, discrimination, and other issues affecting women.

Additionally, the study found that Latin American countries introduced a significantly larger number of gender-sensitive policies, which we further analyzed by breaking down the policies into subcategories. However, we also observe that these results vary significantly among countries within the LAC and among the subcategories within gender-sensitive policies. To explain some of these variations, we looked into the particular cases of Argentina and Cuba.

In the case of Argentina, we argue that among the many existing factors, institutional and legislative support has been influential in not only increasing the absolute number of women in parliament but also in empowering these politicians. This empowerment may be reflected in the number of gender-sensitive policies introduced during the study period. In Cuba, a lack of institutional strength and a

discouraging cultural environment that systematically discriminates against women may have been driving forces limiting the implementation of gender-specific policies during this pandemic despite the high proportion of women in parliament. In Latin America, women have been disproportionately affected by COVID-19. This exposes the vulnerabilities that persist in the region despite the gradual increase in women's political representation (World Bank, 2022). Based on our findings, we conclude that although increased descriptive representation in parliament has been crucial for increasing the substantive representation of women's interests, there are other factors besides these that have contributed to implementing policies targeting women in Latin America. This is consistent with the findings of Sacchet (2008) and Peschard (2003).

This study is the first to analyze the relationship between increased female representation in parliament and the implementation of female-focused policies in the specific context of the COVID-19 pandemic using the database provided by the UNDP. Previous studies have broadly addressed the issues of descriptive and substantive representation. However, we have tried to further examine how this relationship changes during a global crisis. Nevertheless, this study has several limitations. We attempted to provide an overall pattern of linkages between female political participation and their representation. However, there was enormous variation within the regions and among the countries included in our dataset. To provide a comprehensive picture of the relationship between these two variables, it is necessary to conduct in-depth and more specific country-level studies. Although we include a brief analysis of two contrasting countries (Argentina and Cuba) to address this issue, we acknowledge that this reveals only a small fraction of the whole picture. Future research could build on our findings and delve deeper into the specific factors that affect female representation during crises.

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