Gender and the Latin American Voter
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Historically, Latin American women have faced economic inequalities, social injustices, and political exclusion, and despite some advances these patterns persist. Do broad societal divisions between the sexes translate into different preferences at the voting booth? Interestingly, authors of the seminal and eponymous book about the American Voter and some of their successors largely relegated discussion of gender differences to brief asides (Campbell et al. 1960; Miller and Shanks 1996). But recently scholars of advanced democracies have brought attention to political gender gaps (Box-Steefensmeier, De Boef, and Lin 2004; Inglehart and Norris 2003; Kaufmann and Petrocik 1999; Manza and Brooks 1998). Women in these countries typically embraced conservative attitudes and behaviors with greater frequency than men, resulting in so-called “traditional gender gaps.” But over the past 30 years, patterns have shifted. In some countries women today are more supportive of left-leaning candidates, parties, and ideological positions than men, outcomes we can call “modern gender gaps.”

Gender differences in voting behavior and ideology have received considerably less attention outside advanced (post)industrial societies.¹ A handful of studies that include cases from the developing world suggest traditional gender gaps have largely persisted in these countries as women have remained more conservative in their attitudes and less engaged in politics than men (Arana and Santa Cruz 2005; Desposato and Norrander 2009; Inglehart and Norris 2003; Montero 1975). However, theories explaining the evolution of gender gaps as well as findings from the United States and Europe hint that this pattern might be in transition. Existing studies of the developed world have argued that processes such as the declining influence of religion (Boas and Smith, this volume; DeVaus and McAllister 1989), women’s increasing independence (Box-Steefensmeier et al. 2007; Carroll 1988; Giger 2009), and the

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¹ A rich body of scholarship explores other topics pertaining to women in Latin American politics such as analyses of women’s movements (Baldez 2002), descriptive and substantive representation (Schwindt-Bayer 2010), and gendered facets of social policy (Blofield 2012; Ewig 2010; Htun 2003).
advancement of post-material values (Inglehart and Norris 2003) contribute to shifts from traditional to modern gender gaps. If these processes are also relevant for understanding gender differences in the developing world, then movement from traditional toward modern gender gaps may well be occurring across Latin America. Moreover, regional variation in processes like secularization, values transformation, and women’s economic and personal empowerment has the potential to yield interesting cross-national differences in the direction and significance of gender gaps.

This chapter describes and analyzes gender differences in vote choice across the region and explores the factors that influence voting for Latin America’s recent wave of female presidential candidates. After outlining the contours of gender gaps in the region, I build a theoretical model of gender gaps in vote choice. I assess how the voting decisions of women and men are shaped by individual-level factors including childhood socialization, adult socialization, female autonomy and issue attitudes as well as contextual variables such as development, female advancement and party system features. The findings indicate that limits on female autonomy, particularly female employment which produces both individual- and contextual-level effects, and the conservatizing influence of motherhood (but not fatherhood) have contributed to the persistence of traditional gender gaps in the region. Thus, expanding women’s independence has the potential to promote movement toward more modern gender gaps. Additionally, analyzing voting for female candidates demonstrates that women vote for women. In so doing, they opt for descriptive representation, in part calculating that female leaders are more likely attuned to their concerns than the male-dominated political establishment. This finding paired with evidence that party system polarization does not prompt more ideologically-motivated voting among women
suggests that Latin American party systems may not effectively incorporate women’s interests into their programmatic appeals.

**Gender Divides in Latin America**

While inequities remain, notable progress has been made in reducing gender-based marginalization in the region. Women are much more likely to engage in paid work than they were 20 years ago.\(^2\) Average female labor force participation in the region now surpasses 55%, ranging from highs in Peru and Uruguay of 71% and 67%, respectively, to a low in Honduras of 44%. Latin American women have entered professional occupations at significant rates as well, surpassing half the workforce in this sector in several countries including Uruguay, Argentina, and Venezuela (Hausman, Tyson and Zahidi 2011). Women have also made gains in the social realm. While Latin America’s Catholic Church hierarchy still opposes abortion and contraception, average fertility rates have fallen from 3.7 in 1990 to 2.5 in 2011. Brazil, Chile and Costa Rica have fertility rates slightly below the United States’ rate of 1.9. However, abortion remains illegal throughout most of the region despite moves in Mexico City and Uruguay to allow at least some access during the first trimester.

Female presence in politics has also grown (Buvnic and Roza 2004). Due at least in part to many Latin American countries enacting gender quota laws requiring parties to nominate women for elected office, women held 22.1% of seats in the region’s legislatures in 2012. This marks a significant increase over the 7.8% occupied by women in 1990. Female representation in executive cabinets has also expanded from 7% of ministerial posts in 1990 to 18% in the mid-2000s (Escobar-Lemmon and Taylor-Robinson 2005).

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\(^2\) Unless otherwise noted, all statistics in this paragraph are averages of the 18 Latin American countries included in this volume and were calculated using data from the World Bank’s GenderStats database (World Bank 2013).
Previous research on the developed world suggests that this sort of progress toward greater equality for women has the potential to promote political engagement and progressive attitudes among women, thereby reshaping gendered dimensions of political behavior. But despite these changes, traditional gender gaps in voting behavior persist in the region. While early research on the gendered dimensions of Latin American voting behavior was limited, evidence from 1960s Chile and Argentina suggests that women typically voted for conservative and confessional parties at higher rates than men (Gil and Parrish 1965; Lewis 1971). Survey data from the first decade of the 21st century indicates that Latin American women remain more conservative than men, but only slightly so.

FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

Throughout the chapter, I calculate gender gaps so that positive scores signify modern gender gaps in which women are to the left of men, while negative scores denote traditional gaps in which women are right of men. Figure 1 displays region-wide gender gaps in voting (light gray) and ideology (dark gray) over time.3 The negative values that we observe demonstrate that gender gaps in voting and ideology across the region are traditional, with women slightly but consistently more right-leaning than men.4 Given that the standardized ideology and vote choice scales used in these figures surpass 300 points, the depicted gender gaps are quite small. These slight gender differences in ideology are statistically significant in all years, but the gaps in voting are only statistically distinguishable from zero in 2006 and 2012.5

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3 Data are from the 2004-2012 Americas Barometer surveys in 18 Latin American countries described in the introduction to this volume.

4 The vote choice measure employed here is essentially the same as that utilized throughout this section of the book, with respondents’ ideology identified according to the candidate for which they cast their vote in the most recent presidential election. Ideology is measured using a survey question in which respondents are asked to place themselves on a 10-point left-right scale. To facilitate identification of traditional versus modern gender gaps, both variables are coded here so that higher scores indicate more left-leaning positions.

5 The standardized scale for ideology has a 360-point range, and the range on the standardized vote scale is 308. To make the gaps in voting and ideology more comparable in Figures 1 and 2, the scales were divided by their standard
FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

Figure 2 breaks down gender gaps by country, depicting gaps in voting (light gray) and ideology (dark gray) as reported in the 2012 Americas Barometer survey. Six countries have statistically significant traditional gender gaps in voting: Dominican Republic, Chile, Peru, Bolivia, Colombia, and El Salvador. Whereas traditional gaps in ideology are found in Argentina, Uruguay, Bolivia, and El Salvador. The only significant modern gender gaps are for voting in Panama and ideology in Costa Rica. Interestingly, the data demonstrate very little in-country congruence in the observed gender gaps for both ideology and vote choice. El Salvador is the only country that manifests significant gaps in the same direction for both measures, while eight countries have a negative sign on one scale and a positive sign on the other. The lack of congruence in the patterns for ideology and voting suggests that ideological divides are not translated directly into differences in voting preferences, suggesting that the gaps in voting are likely moderated by factors such as electoral context, party system, and candidate characteristics. I explore these possibilities below.

Overall, these data on Latin American gender gaps indicate that where they exist, gaps are frequently traditional, with women being more ideologically conservative and voting for more right-leaning candidates. However, most countries exhibit small or nonexistent gender gaps. It is possible that gender simply does not shape political behavior in the region. On the other hand, Latin America is in transition toward more gender equality in the home and the workplace, and these economic and cultural changes may be reshaping political attitudes and behavior, creating the illusion of insignificant gender effects as gaps shift from traditional toward deviation before calculating gender gaps. Given that the original scales are not inherently meaningful and that the figures are intended to identify and compare the direction of gender gaps over time and across countries, the raw numbers are not of much relevance and standardizing the scales merely facilitates presentation. The rest of the analysis uses unstandardized versions of the scales.
modern. I explore this possibility by examining how gender differences in Latin American voting behavior are shaped by a range of factors with potential for promoting convergence or divergence among women and men.

**Individual-Level Explanations of Gender Gaps**

Previous research on gender gaps in political attitudes and behavior suggests several theories concerning the existence and evolution of voting differences between women and men in Latin America. Here I focus on four individual-level accounts of gender gaps: childhood socialization, adult socialization, female autonomy, and attitudinal. Through the discussion that follows, I adapt existing research findings to the Latin American context because despite a few notable exceptions (e.g. Desposato and Norrander 2009; Inglehart and Norris 2003; Morgan and Buice 2013), most scholarship in this vein focuses on the United States and Western Europe.

The childhood socialization argument is rooted in the idea that boys and girls are treated differently as they grow up, and these divergent socialization experiences produce different political attitudes and behavior (Manza and Brooks 1998). Under this view, parents play a vital role in the attitude formation of children. If parents inculcate boys and girls with distinct views of their appropriate roles, with girls being encouraged toward nurturing and boys taught to be more concerned about strength, they are also likely promote traditionally gendered stances toward politics (Gilligan 1982). Given mothers’ centrality to child-rearing, their experiences and orientations are of particular importance. A mother’s education may be especially influential, as educated women are more likely to experience the feminist consciousness-raising that frequently accompanies more schooling. As a result, children raised by educated mothers have greater opportunities to develop modern gender norms, while those with less educated mothers may be inclined toward traditional gender roles (Bolzendahl and Myers 2004; Ciabattari 2001). Although

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6 These categories build on Manza and Brooks (1998).
Latin American women now approach or even surpass educational parity with men, previous generations of women did not have such opportunities (Duryea et al. 2007). Their limited education and resulting missed opportunities for feminist consciousness-raising may contribute to the perpetuation of traditional gender gaps among their children, who are today’s adults.

The adult socialization argument moves beyond early upbringing and emphasizes gendered experiences more temporally proximate to present voting behavior. This approach argues that adult family dynamics are central in shaping gender differences (Sapiro 1983). One view of adult socialization suggests that women in non-traditional family arrangements, such as not having children or being divorced, are likely to take more progressive stances toward politics because such experiences transform their attitudes and interests in liberalizing ways (Klein 1984). Thus, women who are not mothers are likely to hold less conservative political attitudes than women who follow a more traditional path (Campbell et al. 1960; Plutzer 1988). If this perspective is correct, motherhood will contribute to traditional gender gaps.\(^7\)

Arguments that emphasize female autonomy, or lack thereof, in shaping political attitudes and behavior suggest that more independent women who are able to form preferences outside the context of the traditional family will be more politically progressive. More autonomous women are likely to prioritize their individual self-interest rather than primarily considering the interests of their partners or households (Box-Steffensmeier et al. 2004; Buvnic and Roza 2004; Carroll 1988; Desposato and Norrander 2009; Giger 2009; Morgan and Buice 2013). Factors that promote female autonomy include participating in paid work, greater economic power within the household, and being unmarried. Because the Latin American left has typically promoted more pro-female policies (Sacchet 2009), I expect women with greater

\(^7\) An alternative view of adult socialization suggests motherhood primes women to seek left-oriented policies that support their role as care-givers, such as public investment in education and healthcare (Manza and Brooks 1998). This view is not supported in the analysis below.
autonomy to vote for more left-leaning candidates. Given gender inequalities in labor force participation and wages (Ñopo 2012), lower levels of autonomy among women as compared to men may contribute to traditional gender gaps in voting preferences.

Attitudinal accounts of the gender gap argue that men and women have different positions on gender and political issues, which translate into more general divides in political orientations and behavior (Kaufman and Petrocik 1999; Studlar, McAllister, and Hayes 1998). This line of thinking suggests that the advancement of feminist ideals among women and women’s disproportionate support for government provision of social welfare pushes women toward supporting left candidates who align with these positions, fostering modern gender gaps (Conover 1988; Kaufman and Petrocik 1999; Manza and Brooks 1998; Plutzer and Zipp 1996).

Analysis of Individual-level Explanations for the Gender Gap

To assess the extent to which these various accounts help us understand gender gaps in Latin American voting, I conduct region-wide analysis of vote choice, assessing how the gender gap varies after taking account of each of these potential explanations in turn. Based on this analysis, Figure 3 presents the regression coefficient for female – that is, the effect of being female on vote choice – after separately introducing four sets of variables designed to assess each theoretical explanation. Specifically, the figure depicts how variation in female and male childhood socialization (row 2), adult socialization (row 3), levels of autonomy (row 4), and issue attitudes (row 5) contribute to gender gaps in voting. In essence, this analysis allows us to

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8 The analysis employs hierarchical linear models because the intra-class correlation coefficient indicates that 48.5% of the variance in vote choice is cross-national. The analysis includes random slope coefficients for sex, which demonstrate there are statistically significant differences in the relationship between sex and vote across countries. All models in Figure 3 include two country-level controls: lack of religiosity, measured using the share of AmericasBarometer respondents who do not affiliate with any religion, and the Gender Inequality Index, which captures gender differences in health, education, political representation, and unemployment (UNDP 2011b). While in theory these variables could matter, neither has a significant effect on vote choice nor does their inclusion alter the size or significance of the gender gap.
evaluate how the gender gap changes after controlling for each of these potential sources of voting differences between women and men. Recall that in this chapter the vote choice measure is coded so that higher values indicate support for more left-leaning presidential candidates. As a result, negative and significant coefficients in the figure denote traditional gender gaps, while positive and significant coefficients would point to modern gaps. Insignificant coefficients, indicated by white bars, reflect the elimination of a measurable gender gap in voting after including a particular set of explanations in the analysis. The disappearance of the gender gap suggests that differences between women and men on a given factor (or factors) play an important role in explaining gender gaps in vote choice.

FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE

The first model, represented by the black bar at the top of the figure, depicts the effect of being female only controlling for contextual effects. The traditional gender gap observed in this base model reiterates the evidence in Figure 1 – women reported voting for right-leaning presidential candidates more than men. The next four rows separately add variables assessing each theoretical explanation in succession: childhood socialization (model 2), adult socialization (model 3), autonomy (model 4), and feminist as well as policy attitudes (model 5). They also include demographic controls for respondent’s age, church attendance, household well-being, education, and skin color.9

The black bar associated with model 2 indicates that childhood socialization, measured using the education of the respondent’s mother,10 does not reduce the size or statistical significance of the traditional gender gap. While mother’s education has a significant effect on vote choice, with children of less educated mothers more likely to vote for left candidates, the

9 See supplemental information for details on coding and effects for independent variables.
10 This question was only asked of half the sample in most countries.
effect of female is unchanged compared to model 1. Based on this evidence, mother’s education does not explain the gender gap in voting. Moreover, in additional analysis not shown here I considered whether the same childhood socialization experiences influence women and men differently, with less educated mothers potentially having a greater conservatizing influence on daughters than sons. However, this analysis revealed no gender difference in the way mother’s education shapes voting preferences.\textsuperscript{11}

Including parenthood as a measure of adult socialization in model 3 appears to have a similarly unremarkable effect on the gender gap. Being a parent does not alter the magnitude of the coefficient for female and only slightly reduces its statistical significance. But here analyzing women and men separately is important. Considering how a respondent’s sex interacts with being a parent reveals significant differences in the ways that mothering and fathering influence vote choices. Being a mother is linked to more electoral conservatism for women, while fatherhood has the opposite relationship and is associated with more left voting.\textsuperscript{12} Thus, women who engage in the traditional female role of motherhood are also more likely to take traditional stances toward politics and vote for right-leaning candidates. The divergent effects of parenting on vote choices of women and men play an important role in perpetuating traditional gender gaps in the region. After accounting for this interaction between parenthood and respondent sex, being female has no significant relationship with vote choice, and among non-parents the gender gap actually becomes positive (but still insignificant).

Returning to Figure 3, incorporating measures of autonomy (marital status, employment, and relative financial power within the household) also significantly reduces the magnitude of

\textsuperscript{11} Supplemental materials contain details of this interaction effect between respondent’s sex and mother’s education.

\textsuperscript{12} The conditional effect of parenting among men = 0.42, p < .01, while the conditional effect among women = -0.37, p < .10. Supplemental materials contain more details of this interaction effect between sex and parenthood.
the gender gap and, in fact, eliminates its statistical significance. Among the three autonomy measures, only employment has a statistically significant effect on vote choice, with those in the workforce more likely to vote for the left than those not currently working. Women are much less autonomous than men in this regard, with female respondents’ workforce participation half that of males. Thus, many women are not experiencing the liberalizing effect of working outside the home. As a result, non-working women maintain traditional political stances, while their husbands, brothers, fathers, and sons enter the workforce and develop more left-leaning orientations. Differences in levels of workforce participation between women and men help explain the existence of a traditional gender gap in Latin American voting.

The last set of individual factors considered in Figure 3 includes attitudes toward social policy and feminist issues. I measure support for social policy using a scale built from four survey items about the role of the state in promoting social welfare by: guaranteeing well-being, creating jobs, reducing inequality, and providing healthcare. Feminist attitudes include three separate items: support for female political leadership, support for abortion access if the mother’s health is at risk, and opposition to prioritizing male over female employment. The effect of being female after controlling for these factors demonstrates that they do very little to alter the size or significance of the gender gap. Attitudinal differences between women and men are not

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13 To measure relative financial power in the household, I employ an item asking respondents to specify if they contributed financially to the household or if their partner earned all or most of the income. Using this item, I create an ordinal scale with four categories: married female with no income; married female with some income but less than her partner; other females (who are either unpartnered or earn more than their partners), and men. Higher scores indicate greater autonomy.

14 None of the autonomy measures have significant interactions with respondent sex, indicating that while gender differences in levels of autonomy contribute to more conservative female voting, there are no differences in the way autonomy influences women and men.

15 The scale is created by averaging responses across the four items; respondents who answered at least two of the questions receive a score based upon the non-missing data. Factor analysis of these four questions reveals one factor with an Eigenvalue of 2.29, and the Cronbach’s alpha score is 0.83. Additional analysis using each individual component separately produces the same substantive effects as those reported for the scale.

16 The final two items were only asked of half the respondents; results on the other variables remain the same if these items are excluded and the full sample remains intact.
drivers of the traditional gender gap. In fact, while female voters hold more feminist attitudes than men concerning employment and descriptive representation, there are no differences in women’s and men’s attitudes about abortion or social policy. In additional analysis, I explored whether these issue attitudes might differentially shape the vote choices of men and women. Surprisingly, the only issue with a significantly different effect among females and males is abortion attitudes, with support for abortion rights associated more strongly with left voting among men than women.¹⁷ This finding suggests that men link their abortion preferences to the general ideological positioning of presidential candidates, while women do not necessarily see candidates’ positions on abortion as aligning with candidates’ ideologies.

The final model in figure 3 incorporates all the independent variables discussed above. The unshaded bar indicates there is no significant gender gap in voting after controlling for differences in socialization, autonomy, and issue attitudes among men and women. As the above discussion indicates, limited female autonomy due to lack of employment perpetuates conservative political behavior among women. Higher male workforce participation means that as more men than women enjoy the autonomy of paid work, they are more likely to experience consciousness-raising in the workplace, which tend to promote more left-leaning orientations. The divergent influence of parenthood among women and men, with mothers being significantly more conservative than fathers, also contributes to the traditional gender gap in voting. Additional analysis of ideology as the dependent variable, which is not shown here, offers further support for this conclusion. Motherhood has a significant negative relationship with left ideology, and taking account of this effect shifts the ideology gender gap in the more modern direction just as we observed for vote choice.

Context and the Gender Gap

¹⁷ The conditional effect of abortion support among men = 0.21, p < 0.10; among women the effect = -0.27, p < 0.01.
Thus far, the discussion has focused on individual-level explanations of the gender gap suggested in previous research. However, country context might also shape observed gender differences in the electoral arena. While little attention has been paid to the way context shapes gender gaps in Latin American voting, a growing literature points to the significance of context for explaining gender differences in political engagement, efficacy and attitudes (Atkeson 2003; Desposato and Norrander 2009; Hansen 1997; Morgan and Buice 2013).

Existing scholarship concerning gender gaps suggests socio-structural factors related to modernization, such as economic development and secularism, create a socialization context that might promote modern gender gaps. These indicators of modernization are largely viewed as operating mechanistically in ways that contribute to over-time change in the gender gap. Religiosity, for example, is a conservatizing factor, the decline of which might push women in particular (who tend to be more religious) toward the left (DeVaus and McAllister 1989; Moore and Vanneman 2003). Similarly, economic development might encourage post-material and feminist values, which are associated with modern gender gaps (Buvnic and Roza 2004; Inglehart and Norris 2003; Iversen and Rosenbluth 2006). However, the models presented in Figure 3, which included an aggregate measure of secularism, found no effect for country-level religiosity on the gender gap. In additional analysis detailed in Supplemental Table A, I considered the potential influence of economic development, but found no evidence that economic modernization affects gender gaps in Latin American voting. These results run

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18 Development is measured using gross national income (GNI) per capita in constant 2005 US dollars, adjusted for purchasing power parity (UNDP 2011a). Additional analysis also found no significant interaction between GNI and respondent sex.
19 The individual-level variables included in the models assessing contextual effects parallel those analyzed in Figure 3. Only mother's education, attitudes regarding abortion and female employment are excluded because they were asked of only half of respondents.
contrary to developmental theories but align with previous cross-national research on gender
gaps in Latin America (Desposato and Norrander 2009).

The individual-level analysis above and previous research together point toward other
contextual effects. The finding that female autonomy plays an important role in promoting left
voting among women in the workforce suggests that women’s economic independence may
produce society-wide effects as well. Moreover, previous research has found that women and
men respond differently to female advancement in terms of their political behaviors and
attitudes, indicating that societal-level measures of women’s progress may offer analytical
leverage in our understanding of gender differences in voting behavior (Beaman et al. 2009;
Desposato and Norrander 2009; Morgan and Buice 2013; Morgan, Espinal and Hartlyn 2008).
The analysis here considers two indicators of female advancement: the Gender Inequality Index
(GII) and the share of professional jobs filled by women.\textsuperscript{20} GII is a composite index of women’s
equality developed by the UNDP. The share of female professionals, which is not part of the
composite index, provides a specific indicator of women’s economic opportunities (Hausman,
Tyson and Zahidi 2011).\textsuperscript{21}

GII has no significant direct or interactive effects on vote choice or the gender gap.
However, the share of female professionals has a significant effect in interaction with
respondent’s sex such that the share of professional women shapes how women vote. Figure 4a
plots this interactive effect.\textsuperscript{22} In countries where the share of female professionals is low, women
are significantly more conservative in their political orientation than men, voting for more right-

\textsuperscript{20} I also considered potential effects for women in the legislature, female labor force participation, women in
managerial positions, and the presence of a female presidential candidate in the election, but none altered the gender
gap or influenced voting behavior.
\textsuperscript{21} This sector includes occupations such as architects, engineers, scientists, doctors, nurses, teachers, clergy,
lawyers, and artists.
\textsuperscript{22} The full model is presented in Supplemental Table A, column 1.
leaning presidential candidates. However, once women constitute at least 48% of the professional sector, female respondents, regardless of their own employment status, are no more likely to vote for candidates on the right than men are. In other words, the presence of a critical mass of women in professional jobs fosters more progressive attitudes among women across society, eliminating the gender gap in contexts like Venezuela, Argentina, Chile and Uruguay, where women have attained significant economic empowerment through professional employment. This suggests that while economic development itself has no effect on the gender gap, economic opportunities for women can play an important role in reducing and even eliminating traditional gender divides, encouraging women to vote more progressively.

Moreover, this finding reinforces the results of the analysis above, which pointed to the importance of female workforce participation in promoting more left-leaning attitudes among individual women and thereby closing traditional gender gaps.23

FIGURE 4 ABOUT HERE

I also explore if party system dynamics shape gender gaps. The structure of the party system and the nature of the appeals made at election time are likely to shape voters’ electoral calculus. For instance, voters presented with distinct ideological options at the polls might be more inclined to vote based on policy appeals, rather than clientelist ones. Alternatively, in less programmatic systems voters may opt for descriptive representation, hoping for some responsiveness from elected officials who share similar backgrounds, rather than prioritizing substantive policy congruence with candidates. Moreover, these party system features may have different effects among women and men, influencing gender gap patterns in the region. If party

23 Also see Morgan and Buice (2013) for a discussion of the importance of female economic empowerment in promoting gender egalitarian attitudes among women.
programs are primarily targeted to appeal to male voters, then (lack of) ideological structure in the party system might influence men more than women.

To explore these effects, I consider how party system polarization interacts with respondent sex to shape gender gaps in voting. Polarization is estimated using data from the Parliamentary Elites in Latin America study. Higher scores on the polarization measure signify a more defined programmatic space while lower scores denote greater overlap across parties. Analysis incorporating this measure indicates that the traditional gender gap widens as polarization in a country’s party system increases; this pattern is depicted in Figure 4b. Where polarization is low, women and men make similar voting decisions. But as polarization increases (largely because there are parties on the ideological left instead of just the center and right), men become more supportive of left-leaning presidential candidates, while women’s behavior does not change. Therefore, the effect of being a woman is increasingly negative at higher polarization levels, and as a result, greater party system polarization is associated with a widening in the traditional gender gap. This evidence indicates that the ideological signals transmitted in more polarized party systems shape the behavior of male but not female voters. This finding suggests the possibility that Latin American party systems do not effectively incorporate women’s interests into their programmatic appeals.

Gender Gaps in Voting for Female Candidates

In the final portion of this chapter, I move beyond analysis of vote choice generally and explore voters’ decisions to cast their ballot for female presidential candidates. In recent years, a

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24 This particular measure of polarization is based upon legislators’ self-placement on an ideological scale. From this information, each party received an average ideology score. Using these party scores, polarization was calculated following Dalton (2008). Other measures of polarization based on the PELA data and the Democratic Accountability and Linkages Project (DALP) (Kitschelt and Freeze 2010) revealed similar results to those presented here. I also considered potential effects for measures of clientelism, party system cohesion, and effective number of parties but found no significant effects.

25 The full model is presented in Supplemental Table A, column 2.
growing number of Latin American women have contested and even won elections for their country’s highest political office. At the time of writing, there are three female chief executives in the region – Costa Rica’s Laura Chinchilla, Argentina’s Cristina Fernández, and Brazil’s Dilma Rousseff; several other countries in the region have former female presidents. Moreover, women have contested the presidency under major party banners in the most recent elections held in Colombia, Mexico, Peru, Panama and Paraguay.

Here I consider the factors that shape voters’ decisions to cast their ballot for these female candidates. Again, the main variable of interest is respondent’s sex. In addition to sex, all versions of the analysis incorporate a series of individual-level measures: age, church attendance, household well-being, education, and skin color. The results show that younger people as well as those from poorer households, with less education and with darker skin are more likely to have voted for a female presidential candidate. At the contextual level, the models consider the effects of GII and female professionals, with less gender inequality and more professional women associated with greater support for female candidates. Most importantly for our focus here, the analyses presented in columns 1 and 2 of Table 1 demonstrate that women are significantly more likely than men to support female presidential candidates, even controlling for these socio-demographic and contextual factors. This finding aligns with evidence from existing single-country studies analyzing voting for female candidates (Yanez 2001).

TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

To explore if this effect for respondent sex is more than simply an artifact of parties that typically appeal to women choosing to nominate a female candidate, I compared the gender gap in voting for the woman to the gender gap in voting for the male candidate from the same party

26 The analysis includes Chinchilla, Fernández, and Rousseff as well as Balbina Herrera in Panama, Noemí Sanín in Colombia, Keiko Fujimori in Peru, Blanca Ovelar in Paraguay, and Marina Silva in Brazil. The Mexican elections that included Josefina Vázquez were held after the 2012 AmericasBarometer surveys were conducted.
in the most recent all-male presidential contest using data from the AmericasBarometer survey conducted closest to that election. In Costa Rica, Panama, and to a lesser extent Colombia, female voters did not disproportionately support the male candidate backed by the same party that later nominated a female candidate. In Brazil, there is no significant bivariate gender gap in voting for Dilma Rousseff nor for her co-partisan and predecessor President Lula da Silva. Unexpectedly, in Paraguay there was significantly less female support for Colorado party nominee Blanca Ovelar than for the male candidate in the previous election. Despite this anomaly, the pattern suggests that parties generally attract more female voters when they have women heading their presidential tickets than when a man is the nominee, reinforcing the consistent finding in Table 1 that women disproportionately vote for women if the option is available.

At first blush then, women appear to be opting for descriptive representation in voting for other women, perhaps hoping that female presidents might prioritize women’s policy concerns, thus converting descriptive representation into substantive representation. But this pattern of descriptive of representation might belie other forms of substantive congruence in ideology or issue positions between female voters and candidates. Models 3 through 6 in Table 1 explore this possibility. In model 3, I assess whether ideological congruence with female candidates encourages voters to support women at the polls. To measure congruence, I take the absolute value of the distance between respondents’ ideological self-placement and the expert-scored ideological position of the female candidate’s party from Wiesehomeier and Benoit (2009). Higher values indicate greater ideological distance between voter and candidate, and we would

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27 The comparison in Colombia is between the Conservative candidate Sanín in the 2012 data and the independent Uribe who was backed by the Conservative party in the 2006 elections (data from 2008). Suitable comparisons are not possible in Argentina, where Fernández was the candidate in both elections for which AmericasBarometer data are available, or in Peru where the previous election was not an all-male contest.
expect a significant negative coefficient for this variable if people vote for female candidates based on ideological affinity. However, we observe no such effect, and this insignificant relationship is uniform across female and male respondents. In additional analysis not shown, I explored whether women’s support for female candidates was more pronounced in voting for women on the left like Dilma Rousseff (Brazil) or for women on the right like Keiko Fujimori (Peru). However, the effect of respondent’s sex remained constant regardless of the candidate’s ideology. These findings indicate that women across Latin America are choosing descriptive representation and voting for female candidates at disproportionately high rates regardless of the candidate’s ideological position.

Model 4 explores whether gender stereotypes about the issue positions of female politicians shape voting for women presidential candidates. The common perception is that women in public office will emphasize compassion issues, like healthcare, education, and other social policies. Moreover, if female leaders and female voters both agree that compassion issues are important, social policy attitudes might be particularly influential in encouraging women to support for female candidates. Conversely, female leaders are frequently perceived as being weak on crime. Thus, those who view their community as especially unsafe may be less likely to vote for women, favoring male candidates who stereotypically have a heavier hand in fighting crime. The results in Table 4 indicate that support for social policy has no effect on female or male decisions to vote for women contesting the presidency. Perceived congruence on social issues is not a source of women voting for female candidates. Perceived insecurity does have the expected negative relationship with the pro-female vote, but after accounting for the interaction with respondent sex, perceived insecurity only undermines support for female candidates among

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28 One explanation for this null finding might lie in the general paucity of ideological content to left-right identifications in the Latin American region (see Zechmeister, this volume).
Latin American men. Women do not succumb to the negative stereotype that female leaders are not capable of dealing effectively with insecurity and are therefore not less likely to vote for a female candidate if they feel unsafe in their community.

Finally, models 5 and 6 examine the effects of attitudes toward female political leadership and abortion rights. As we would expect, support for female leadership in the abstract is positively associated with voting for real-world female candidates, but this effect is uniform for both sexes and does not account for the gender gap we observe. Attitudes about abortion rights, on the other hand, have differential effects among men and women. Specifically, support for access to abortion increases the likelihood that a woman will vote for a female candidate while abortion attitudes play no role in shaping male support for female candidates. Moreover, among abortion opponents there is no significant gender gap in voting for female presidential candidates; whereas women who support abortion access are much more likely than male supporters to vote for women.

Thus while gender stereotypes influence male voting decisions regarding female candidates, women who vote for women seem to be doing so in pursuit of substantive as well as descriptive representation. Male voters accept gender stereotypes and reduce their support for female candidates if they feel insecure, but female voters do not allow crime perceptions to color their judgments of women running for president. What’s more, women who support some access to abortion embrace female candidates, perhaps in the hope that women, regardless of their

---

29 The conditional effect of abortion attitudes among women is 0.23, p < 0.01; among men the conditional coefficient is -0.04, p > 0.50.
30 I also considered the possibility that female candidates mobilize or demobilize female voters depending upon their degree of ideological affinity with the candidate. If like-minded women are more likely to turn out and vote while ideologically distant women stay home, the significant pro-female vote from women may reflect ideological and policy considerations beyond those offered as a result of descriptive representation. However, a comparison of the average ideology of women who voted in races with female presidential nominees versus the ideology of women who turned out in previous presidential contests reveals no such pattern. It does not seem that women who share the ideology of the female candidate are especially mobilized to vote.
ideological orientation, will hold more feminist views on this as well as other issues important to women. The fact that women vote for women, no matter what the candidate’s party label or ideological leaning, suggests that Latin American political systems offer more meaningful policy outcomes for women’s concerns through descriptive representation than through traditional left-right conceptions of substantive representation. Combined with the evidence above that polarization influences the voting behavior of men but not women, the significance of descriptive representation in the calculus of female voters implies that the programmatic offers extended by Latin American parties do not successfully appeal to women and instead seem to neglect their concerns. Therefore, rather than being influenced by the ideological orientations of parties, women opt to vote for other women, hoping that their shared identity will result in political and policy decisions that address their most pressing concerns. Given previous research suggesting that female politicians in Latin America prioritize women’s issues (e.g. Jones 1997; Schwindt-Bayer 2006), these perceptions may be well founded.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

This chapter indicates that small but significant traditional gender gaps dominate the Latin American electoral landscape. The analysis of voting preferences provides some indication of the factors most important in shaping gender differences. In particular, motherhood is associated with more conservative choices among women, while women without children behave more like their male counterparts. This evidence lends support to theories of the gender gap which emphasize adult socialization as pivotal in explaining gender differences. Moreover, the evidence supports the idea that women’s employment at the individual level and professional advancement at the societal level close the traditional gender gap. These findings suggest that if women enter the workforce at rates similar to that of men or constitute a large share of
professional workers, traditional gender differences in voting may disappear. Thus, the process of empowering women economically promotes progress toward modern gender gaps.

The significance of factors pertaining to women’s ability to assert independence from home and family and to attain professional status offers some insight into how gender gaps may be in transition across the region. As women throughout Latin America obtain greater autonomy by delaying or avoiding traditional gender roles in the family and by achieving economic independence, a transition from traditional toward modern gender differences is more likely. The absence of significant gender gaps in many individual countries across the region suggests that this process may well be underway, and as women are more frequently in the workplace, especially in professional positions, movement toward modern gender gaps is a likely outcome.

Another important finding indicates that Latin American women are motivated by the opportunity for descriptive representation when women are on the ballot. Throughout the region, female presidential candidates attracted significantly higher levels of support from women than from men. This finding was consistent across the ideological spectrum, with female candidates on both the left and the right drawing support from female voters. The importance of female political leadership in shaping Latin American gender attitudes has been emphasized in previous research (Morgan and Buice 2013), but these findings go further to indicate that the presence of female candidates may alter voting behavior in ways that promote descriptive representation for women as they pursue substantive influence. This result aligns with other studies, primarily in the developed world, which find gender cues transmitted by highly visible female candidates or politicians to be important in fostering political engagement and pro-female voting among women (Atkeson 2003; Desposato and Norrander 2009; Hansen 1997).
Finally, the analysis suggests that Latin American parties and party systems are not connecting effectively with women through typical policy appeals and ideological position-taking. Where party systems present distinct ideological options to voters, these programmatic positions primarily influence men. Women’s votes are not influenced by party system polarization. As a result, the traditional gender gap is wider in countries where distinct ideological choices are available. Moreover, on an issue of particular salience among women – abortion rights – female voters do not view traditional left-right ideological orientations as meaningfully connected to positions on abortion. While men’s abortion attitudes are linked to voting through the general ideological orientations of presidential candidates, women do not see the abortion issue reflected in the left-right divide. Instead women who favor abortion rights vote for female candidates in pursuit of representation. While abortion is the only women’s issue for which we have data, it is possible, even likely, that other gendered concerns such as protection from domestic violence and equality in education and employment follow a similar pattern, with women failing to see the male establishment as responsive to their concerns and thus turning to female leaders, irrespective of ideology. These findings point to a shortcoming in party systems’ capacity to reach female voters through programmatic appeals. Instead, descriptive representation is a strong motivation for female voters, who are seeking to be heard and who may not find meaningful substantive representation in the conventional, male-dominated political process.
Figure 1. Latin American Gender Gaps in Ideology and Voting, 2004-2012

Note: To make voting and ideology more comparable for presentation in a single figure, each scale is divided by its standard deviation before calculating the gender gap shown. The over-time pattern looks exactly the same as unstandardized versions of the scales. The rest of the analysis uses unstandardized scales.
Figure 2. Latin American Gender Gaps in Ideology and Voting by Country, 2012

Note: Bold numbers indicate a significant gender gap; gray numbers indicate an insignificant gap. *Female presidential candidate in last election.
To make voting and ideology more comparable for presentation in a single figure, each scale is divided by its standard deviation before calculating the gender gap shown. The pattern looks exactly the same as unstandardized versions of the scales. The rest of the analysis uses unstandardized scales.
Figure 3. Traditional Gender Gaps in Latin American Vote Choice

1. Effect of Female only
2. Demographics + Childhood autonomy
3. Demographics + Adult socialization
4. Demographics + Autonomy measures
5. Demographics + Attitudes
6. Full Model

Note: Figure displays coefficient for female from hierarchical linear analysis of vote choice in 18 Latin American countries, using 2012 LAPOP data. Negative values indicate that women vote for more right-leaning candidates than men – traditional gender gaps. White bars indicate insignificant effect for female. *Gray bars indicate effect with p-value < 0.10. **Black bars indicate effect with p-value < 0.05.
All models include random coefficients for respondent sex as well as contextual-level controls for the Gender Inequality Index and lack of religiosity.
Models 2-6 include demographic controls for age, church attendance, education, household wealth, and skin color.
Model 1 includes sex plus contextual measures of gender inequality and lack of religiosity. Model 2 adds mother’s education plus individual demographics. Model 3 drops mother’s education and includes parenthood. Model 4 drops parenthood and adds measures of autonomy—employment, marriage and gender inequality in household incomes. Model 5 drops the autonomy measures and adds measures of attitudes about social policy, women’s political leadership, abortion attitudes and views of female employment. Model 6 includes all variables in previous models.
Figure 4. Contextually Conditioned Effect of Being Female

Panel A. Conditioned on Share of Female Professionals

Panel B. Conditioned on Party System Polarization

Note: Solid line indicates estimated effect; dotted lines indicate 90% confidence interval.

Note: Effects calculated using multilevel analysis of vote choice with xtmixed command in Stata 11.0. Both models include random coefficients for sex as well as measures of demographic factors, adult socialization, respondent autonomy, social policy attitudes, and support for female political leadership. Mother’s education, abortion attitudes, and views of female employment are not included because they were only asked of half the sample.
## Table 1. Multilevel Logit Analysis of Voting for Female Presidential Candidates

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<th>INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL VARIABLES</th>
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| Individual-N                                  | 6868  | 6708  | 5455  | 6598  | 6480  | 3655  |
| Country-N                                     | 7     | 7     | 7     | 7     | 7     | 7     |

Standard errors in parentheses. * p < 0.10, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01.
Significance levels for variance components not shown.
Models calculated in Stata 11 using xtmelogit command with MLE option and unstructured covariance matrix.
Analysis only includes the 7 countries where female candidates received at least 5 percent of the vote in the most recent presidential election: Costa Rica, Panama, Colombia, Peru, Paraguay, Brazil and Argentina.
References


Supplemental Table A. Contextual Predictors of Vote Choice: Female Autonomy, Party System Polarization, and Economic Development

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| VARIANCE COMPONENTS                      |         |        |        |
| Sex, random effect                      | 0.43    | 0.35   | 0.51   |
|                                          | (0.17)  | (0.14) | (0.20) |
| Country-level                           | 11.76   | 9.56   | 13.03  |
|                                          | (3.94)  | (3.20) | (4.36) |
| Individual-level                        | 13.50   | 13.50  | 13.50  |
|                                          | (1.16)  | (1.16) | (1.16) |
| Individual-N                            | 14045   | 14045  | 14045  |
| Country-N                               | 18      | 18     | 18     |

Standard errors in parentheses. * p < 0.10, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01.
Significance levels for variance components not shown.
Models calculated in Stata 11 using xtmixed, MLE option and unstructured covariance matrix.
Supplemental Data Appendix: Question Wording and Coding

Independent Variables
Note that all individual-level independent variables are coded so that their minimum value equals zero and their maximum value equals one.

Female: Interviewer-identified sex. Coded 1 if female.

Mother’s education: Question asked “Up to what level of education did your mother complete?” Response options range from none to completed university and are coded so that higher scores indicate higher levels of education.

Age: Respondent’s self-reported years of age.

Church attendance: The survey asked: “How frequently do you attend religious services? More than once per week, once per week, once per month, one or two times a year, and never or practically never.” Higher values are coded to indicate greater religiosity.

Well-being: An index of well-being based upon ownership of a series of 12 household items. Scores account for cross-national and urban-rural differences in access. Higher scores indicate greater well-being.

Less education: Survey asked “What was the last year of school that you completed?” Response options range from none to completed university and are coded so that higher scores indicate lower levels of education.

Skin color: Based on interviewer-identified skin color using a provided color pallet. Higher scores indicated darker skin color.

Parent: Based on a question asking whether or not the respondent has children. Those with children receive a score of one on this variable; those without score zero.

Married: The survey asked “What is your civil status?” Those who indicated that they were married or part of a common law marriage (union libre) receive a score of one on this variable; all others score zero.

Not working: The survey asked “To what do you dedicate yourself primarily? Are you currently working, not working at this moment but are employed, actively looking for work, being a student, taking care of household duties, or retired/disabled?” Those who indicated that they were working or currently employed score a zero on this item; all others score a one.

Household inequality: The survey asked, “Thinking only about you and your partner and the salaries that you earn, which of the following phrases best describe your salaries: you earn nothing and your partner earns everything, you are less than your partner, you and your partner earn more or less the same, you earn more than your partner, you earn all the income and your partner earns nothing?” Responses are coded to assess the extent to which women have
economic power in their household, with higher values indicating less economic power. Men score 0, women who do not have partners or who earn more than their partner score 0.33, women who earn something but less than their partner score 0.67, and women without any income score 1.0.

**Social policy attitudes:** This variable averages respondents’ answers to four questions tapping support for government provision of social welfare: support for the idea that government should provide for the well-being of the people, support for government efforts to create jobs, support for government redistribution, and support for state-provided healthcare. To obtain a score on this variable, respondents needed to reply to at least two of the four questions. Higher scores indicate more support for government provision of social welfare.

**Attitudes regarding female politicians:** The survey asked, “Some say that in general men are better political leaders than women. Do you strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree?” Responses are coded so that higher scores indicate more egalitarian answers.

**Attitudes regarding female employment:** Respondents were asked: “Some say that when there are not enough jobs, men should have more right to the jobs than women. To what extent do you agree or disagree?” Responses are coded so that higher scores indicate more egalitarian answers.

**Abortion attitudes:** The survey asked, “Do you think that interrupting a pregnancy, that is an abortion, would be justified if the mother’s health were at risk?” Those who indicate that abortion would be justified under these conditions receive a score of one; those who do not score a zero.

**Ideological distance:** This variable, which is used only in the analysis of voting for female presidential candidates, measures the ideological distance between each respondent and the female presidential candidate(s) available to them in the most recent election. Respondent ideology is calculated based on a survey question asking respondents to place themselves on a left-right scale, with answers are coded so that higher scores indicate more left-leaning self-placement. The ideological position of the female candidate is derived from the Wiesehomeier and Benoit coding of parties’ ideological positions, coded so that more positive scores indicate more left-leaning ideology. In the case of Brazil where there were two female candidates in the most recent presidential elections (both on the left), I average their ideology in creating this variable. To obtain the ideological distance measure used in the analysis, I then subtract the candidate’s ideology from the respondent’s ideology and take the absolute value so that higher values indicate greater distance between the respondent and the candidate.

**Perceived insecurity:** The survey asked, “Speaking of the place or neighborhood where you live and about the possibility of being a victim of an assault or robbery, do you feel very safe, somewhat safe, somewhat unsafe, or very unsafe?” Scores are coded so that higher values indicate greater perceived insecurity.