

FEMALE SUBSTANTIAL REPRESENTATION IN THE BRAZILIAN  
LEGISLATIVE CHAMBER, FROM 2003 TO 2015

*A REPRESENTAÇÃO SUBSTANTIVA FEMININA NA CÂMARA LEGISLATIVA  
BRASILEIRA, NO PERÍODO DE 2003 A 2015*

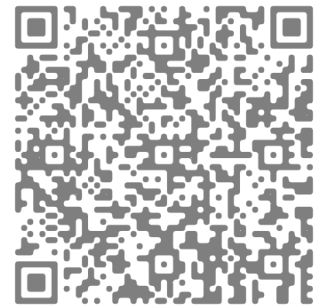
*REPRESENTACIÓN SUSTANCIAL FEMENINA EN LA CÁMARA LEGISLATIVA DE  
BRASIL, DE 2003 A 2015*



Ana Paula Cavalcante LIMÃO DA SILVA<sup>1</sup>  
e-mail: paulacavalcante7@hotmail.com

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<sup>1</sup> Cesumar University (UNICESUMAR), Maringá – PR – Brazil. Professor for higher education courses. Researcher at the Laboratory of Elections, Parties, and Comparative Politics – Lappcom / IFCS/UFRJ and PPGCS/UFRRJ. Doctoral degree in Political Science (UFSCar).

**ABSTRACT:** This article aims to present a mapping of the parliamentary profile of female deputies who assumed mandates in the legislatures of 2003-2007, 2007-2011, and 2011-2015, through the analysis of their legislative production, emphasizing the proposition of bills related to women's issues. The objective is to verify to what extent female parliamentary activity results in substantive representation in the Brazilian Federal Legislative Chamber. This research is based on a theoretical debate about the main conceptions of political representation, especially substantive representation, and its ramifications in the political space. Therefore, substantive representation is considered based on the representative's activity, that is, the content of their political actions and their correspondence with the interests of the electorate. The data for this study were collected from the Chamber of Deputies' website, identifying the place of birth and party affiliation of the female deputies, the number of bills proposed by each parliamentarian, the type of authorship of the proposition, and the status of the matter in the legislative process. In the case of archived propositions, information about the reasons for archiving was also collected. The content of each proposed bill was analyzed, and based on the committees that discussed the matter, a classification of 27 topics addressed by the female deputies in their bills was established. This article highlights that female parliamentarians propose several bills proportional to their male colleagues. Over 50% of the propositions are authored solely by the female deputies, and in terms of the topics addressed, they are related to both "care" areas and areas considered "masculine," such as labor, economy, finance and taxation, administration, and public service. Regarding feminist and women-related topics, these proposals represent only 12% of the total, addressing issues such as work, women's health, and violence against women. In summary, female underrepresentation in politics is a barrier to be overcome, but there have been significant advances in the parliamentary activity of elected women. They are debating topics considered masculine and acting autonomously in Parliament. Thus, this research highlights the importance of minority groups in elected positions. In the case of female deputies, the increase in their political representation strengthens substantive female representation and can contribute to gender issues becoming more visible on the agendas of parliamentarians of both sexes.

**KEYWORDS:** Brazilian federal deputies. Substantive representation. Female parliamentary behavior.

**RESUMO:** Este artigo tem como objetivo apresentar um mapeamento do perfil parlamentar das deputadas que assumiram mandatos nas legislaturas de 2003-2007, 2007-2011 e 2011-2015, por meio da análise da produção legislativa dessas mulheres, com ênfase na proposição de projetos de lei relacionados a temas sobre as mulheres. O objetivo é verificar até que ponto a atuação parlamentar feminina resulta em uma representação substantiva na Câmara Legislativa Federal brasileira. Esta pesquisa baseia-se em um debate teórico sobre as principais concepções da representação política, especialmente a representação substantiva e suas ramificações no espaço político. Portanto, considera-se a representação substantiva a partir da atividade do representante, ou seja, do conteúdo das ações políticas desse líder e sua correspondência com os interesses do eleitorado. Os dados deste estudo foram coletados no Portal da Câmara dos Deputados, identificando a naturalidade e a filiação partidária das deputadas, o número de projetos de lei propostos por cada parlamentar, o tipo de autoria da

*proposição e a situação da matéria no processo legislativo. No caso das proposições arquivadas, foram coletadas informações sobre os motivos desse arquivamento. Também foi analisado o conteúdo de cada projeto proposto, e com base nas comissões que debateram a matéria, definiu-se uma classificação de 27 temas abordados pelas deputadas em seus projetos. Este artigo destaca que as parlamentares propõem um número de projetos proporcional ao de seus colegas homens. Mais de 50% das proposições são de autoria única e, em relação aos temas abordados, eles estão relacionados tanto a áreas de “cuidado” quanto a áreas consideradas “masculinas”, como trabalho, economia, finanças e tributação, administração e serviço público. No que diz respeito a temas feministas e para mulheres, essas propostas representam apenas 12% do total, abordando assuntos como trabalho, saúde da mulher e violência contra as mulheres. Em resumo, a sub-representação feminina na política é uma barreira a ser superada, mas há avanços significativos na atuação parlamentar das mulheres eleitas. Elas estão debatendo temas considerados masculinos e atuando de forma autônoma no Parlamento. Assim, esta pesquisa ressalta a importância da presença de grupos minoritários em cargos eletivos. No caso das deputadas, o aumento de sua representação política fortalece a representação substantiva feminina e pode contribuir para que as questões de gênero sejam mais visíveis nas agendas dos parlamentares de ambos os sexos.*

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** *Deputadas federais brasileiras. Representação substantiva. Comportamento parlamentar feminino.*

**RESUMEN:** *Este artículo se propone presentar un mapeo del perfil parlamentario de las diputadas que asumieron mandatos en las legislaturas 2003-2007, 2007-2011 y 2011-2015, a través del análisis de la producción legislativa de estas mujeres, con énfasis en la propuesta de proyectos de ley que tratan temas sobre la mujer, con el fin de verificar en qué medida la actuación parlamentaria femenina resulta en una representación sustantiva en la Cámara Legislativa Federal brasileña. Esta investigación parte de un debate teórico sobre las principales concepciones de representación política, con énfasis en la representación sustantiva y sus consecuencias en el espacio político. Así, la representación sustantiva se considera desde la actividad del representante, es decir, desde el contenido de la acción política de ese líder y cuál es su correspondencia con los intereses del electorado. Los datos para este trabajo fueron recolectados en el Portal de la Cámara de Diputados, identificando el lugar de nacimiento y filiación partidaria de los diputados, número de proyectos de ley propuestos por cada parlamentario, tipo de autoría de la propuesta, situación del asunto en el trámite legislativo y en el caso de propuestas archivadas, se recogió el motivo del archivo. También se verificó el contenido de cada proyecto propuesto y con base en las comisiones que debatieron el tema, se definió una clasificación de 27 temas abordados por los diputados en sus proyectos. Este artículo muestra que las parlamentarias proponen una cantidad de proyectos proporcional a sus colegas hombres, más del 50% de las propuestas son de un solo autor y en cuanto a los temas de las propuestas, se refieren a áreas relacionadas con el “cuidado” y con la en igual medida en áreas “duras”, tales como trabajo, economía, hacienda y tributación, administración y servicio público. En relación a los temas de las agendas feministas y de mujeres, suman un porcentaje de sólo el 12% de las propuestas presentadas, parece que estos asuntos abordan temas relacionados con el trabajo, la salud de las mujeres y la violencia contra las mujeres. En definitiva, la infrarrepresentación femenina en la política*

*es una barrera a romper, sobre las mujeres electas se identifican avances importantes en su desempeño parlamentario, se encuentran debatiendo temas considerados masculinos y presentan una acción autónoma en el Parlamento, por lo que esta investigación apunta a importancia de la presencia de grupos minoritarios en los cargos de elección popular. En el caso de las diputadas, la mayor presencia de mujeres en este espacio político fortalece la representación femenina sustantiva, además de poder contribuir a que los temas de género sean más visibles en las agendas de los parlamentarios de ambos sexos.*

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** *Diputados federales brasileños. Representación sustantiva. Comportamiento parlamentario femenino.*

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## 1. Introduction

This article maps the profile of female parliamentarians through data on the legislative production of Brazilian federal deputies in the legislatures of 2003-2007, 2007-2011, and 2011-2015, focusing on the type of legislative proposals related to feminist and women-related issues. The research is based on a bibliographic debate that proposes considering new forms of political representation, with an emphasis on substantive representation, as indicated by the works of Pitkin (1972), Phillips (2001), Mansbridge (2003), Urbinati (2006a, 2006b), Warren (2006), and Young (2006).

In this context, this article aims to analyze the female presence from the perspective of substantive representation and its implications in the Brazilian Parliament. Based on data on the underrepresentation and women's access channels in politics, we propose to analyze the political performance of women and investigate whether there is substantive representation in their parliamentary actions and the results of this form of representation.

We used a quantitative and qualitative methodology to construct this research. Almeida, Lüchmann, and Ribeiro (2012) and Silva (2015) organized a database containing the following information: federal deputies per legislature, bills presented by each of them, number of statements transformed into law, classification by thematic area, and additional observations regarding the legislatures of 2003-2007, 2007-2011, and 2011-2015. This database was complemented with new variables related to synthesizing the content of the proposed bill summaries and the result of the legislative process during the legislatures considered in this study.

The data collection was conducted on the Chamber of Deputies' Portal from July to September 2018, and the data transposition to the SPSS Statistical Program was carried out

between October and December of the same year. This allowed for frequency tests to be conducted among the variables present in the database of this research.

Regarding the proposition of projects authored by women, it is observed that female deputies present projects in areas related to care, such as education, health, children and adolescents, penal code, and violence. However, it is worth noting the progress of these women in proposing projects in *hard* areas such as labor, economy, finance, taxation, administration, and public service. As for the type of authorship of these propositions, it is found that 85% of the projects are authored individually; however, approved plans tend to be jointly authored. About projects with feminist agendas and those aimed at women, female deputies propose a reduced percentage of propositions addressing women's interests in the world of work, situations of violence, and women's health care.

The re-election of women in Parliament represents a form of substantive representation, showing that these women are consolidating themselves in this space, despite the barriers faced to achieving an elective position, motivated by cultural and social factors. Thus, re-election signifies overcoming these difficulties, and future studies may indicate whether these deputies remain in these positions by meeting the interests of their constituents.

Regarding the obstacles to substantive female representation, it is observed that the low number of women in Parliament can interfere with their parliamentary activities. It is identified that men occupy most seats in state and party caucuses; therefore, increasing female presence can contribute to a more significant number of projects on topics related to women.

Regarding the approval of propositions, only 4% of the proposals authored by women result in legal norms. As for the content of these propositions, they cover topics such as commemorative dates, appointments and designations, culture, children and adolescents, penal code and violence, health, administration and public service, sports, gender, traffic code, transportation and transit, electoral code, party organization, referendums and plebiscites, and labor. It is important to emphasize that the low approval of projects occurs for both sexes. In the case of women, the main reason for the filing of propositions is the end of the legislative term. Therefore, the project is archived when there are no requests from the parliamentarians.

## **2. The Female Parliamentary Profile in the Legislatures from 2003 to 2015**

The presence of Brazilian women in Parliament is low; however, an increase in the number of elected female deputies exercising their mandates can be observed throughout the legislatures from the 1990s to 2019. According to data from the IPU<sup>2</sup> the percentage of women in the Brazilian Parliament in the 1990s, 2000s, and 2010s are as follows: in the legislature from 1995 to 1999 (6.6%), 1999 to 2003 (6.8%), 2003 to 2007 (8.6%), 2007 to 2011 (8.6%), 2011 to 2015 (9.9%), 2015 to 2019 (10.7%), and 2019 to 2023 (15%).

The increase in the number of women occupying seats in the Federal Legislative Chamber is noteworthy in the Brazilian legislatures from 2015 to 2019 and 2019 to 2023. In the legislature from 2015 to 2019, there were 65 parliamentarians (51 titular, nine substitutes, and five filling vacancies), representing 10.4% of the total number of women. In the legislature from 2019 to 2023, there were 77 parliamentarians (77 titular and one substitute until March 30, 2019), representing 15% of the total number of women.

When analyzing the legislatures considered in this study (2003-2007, 2007-2011, and 2011-2015), a predominance of male presence occupying seats in the Federal Legislative Chamber is observed, with an average of 90% of the positions filled by men. Therefore, there was no significant increase in the number of women in this space during the period considered in this study.

Thus, as it is a minority group in the Brazilian Federal Legislative Chamber, this research considered all female deputies, including titular members, substitutes (who replace parliamentarians on leave for a certain period), and those filling vacancies (substitutes who assume the parliamentary position), regardless of the period in which they held the position. The following data illustrate this composition:

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<sup>2</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). Available at: <https://www.ipu.org/news/press-releases/2017-03/>. Accessed in 14 jul. 2019.

**Table 1** - Female Deputies by Legislature Conditions from 2003-2007, 2007-2011, and 2011-2015

| Female Deputies by Bylaws | Legislature |            |           |            |           |            |                           |            |
|---------------------------|-------------|------------|-----------|------------|-----------|------------|---------------------------|------------|
|                           | 2003-2007   |            | 2007-2011 |            | 2011-2015 |            | Aggregate of Legislatures |            |
|                           | N           | %          | N         | %          | N         | %          | N                         | %          |
| Titular                   | 42          | 81         | 45        | 87         | 45        | 75         | 132                       | 80         |
| Substitutes               | 6           | 12         | 4         | 8          | 11        | 18         | 21                        | 13         |
| Hired                     | 4           | 8          | 3         | 6          | 4         | 7          | 11                        | 7          |
| <b>Total</b>              | <b>52</b>   | <b>100</b> | <b>52</b> | <b>100</b> | <b>60</b> | <b>100</b> | <b>164</b>                | <b>100</b> |

Source: Compiled by the author using data from the National Congress portal.

Table 01 indicates 164 female deputies in the Federal Legislative Chamber present in the legislatures from 2003 to 2015. Regarding titular female deputies, there is a balance in the number of parliamentarians in this status in the legislatures of 2003-2007 and 2007-2011. From 2011 to 2015, the legislature had fewer titular female deputies compared to the previous parliamentary term. However, this legislature has the highest number of parliamentarians when considering the sum of the titular, substitutes, and those Hired, compared to the others. This is due to the increase in alternate and those filling vacancies who assumed mandates during this period. In terms of percentages, the first legislature had 20% of substitutes and those filling vacancies, the second had 14%, and the third stands out with 25% of female deputies in these conditions.

### 3. Female-authored bills on feminist and women's agendas in the legislatures from 2003 to 2015

In this study, we specifically analyzed propositions with feminist agendas, that is, topics originating from women's movements and groups seeking gender equality in all areas of society, as well as plans aimed at women in general, addressing subjects such as disease prevention and labor rights, among others. This classification considers the bibliographic debate on gender and substantive representation addressed in this research.

To identify the topics related to feminist and women's agendas, we analyzed the subject headings of the projects addressing women's issues. Among the women's plans, topics related to health stand out (such as premenstrual syndrome, prenatal and postpartum care, menopause, prevention and treatment of breast and cervical cancer, rubella and HPV vaccination), aesthetics (plastic surgery), work (social security for homemakers and regulation of professions with a

strong female presence), and civil matters (divorce, paternity recognition, and issues related to motherhood and baby's health).

Regarding feminist topics, we considered those that involve the agenda of feminist movements advocating for gender equality, addressing issues that, when not addressed, can lead to gender inequality. Some examples of these topics include the female body, addressing therapeutic abortion (when the fetus has abnormalities, including anencephaly) and abortion in cases of rape; the right to female sterilization and free choice of contraceptive methods, such as the morning-after pill; health, addressing the rights of women with HIV; public policies in the field of social assistance related to the Bolsa Família benefit for female heads of households and in cases of women who have experienced sexual violence; social security rights for domestic workers; gender discrimination; work, addressing equal labor rights between genders, job stability for pregnant employees, and sexual harassment in the workplace; violence, addressing victims of sexual and domestic violence; tributes to women advocating feminist causes; issues of homophobia and same-sex relationships; rights of women prisoners; sexual orientation for adolescent girls; promoting women's political participation and combating the abusive and discriminatory public use of women's image.

The following table shows the number of projects proposed by female deputies, considering the following classification: feminist schedule, women's docket, and other plans. According to the data below:

**Table 2** - Projects proposed by female deputies aggregated from the legislatures of 2003-2007, 2007-2011, and 2011-2015 by agendas

| Agendas of proposed projects | No. of proposed projects | %   |
|------------------------------|--------------------------|-----|
| Other schedule's             | 2093                     | 88  |
| Feminist agendas             | 232                      | 10  |
| Docket for women             | 42                       | 2   |
| Total                        | 2367                     | 100 |

Source: Compiled by the author using data from the National Congress portal.



Table 2 shows that female deputies proposed 232 projects with feminist agendas and 42 projects with docket for women. Therefore, only 12% of the propositions address women's interests. These data reveal a low percentage of projects proposed by female deputies related to women's issues compared to the rate of projects on other agendas.

In this context, international (CAUL, 1999; CELIS *et al.*, 2008; FRANCESCHET, 2008; PRINCE, 2007) and national studies (CASTRO, 2007; KARLINSKI, 2012; MOTTA, 2016; PAIVA; HENRIQUE; SILVA; 2013; PINHEIRO, 2006; POST, 2015) highlight the importance of substantive female representation in politics, as well as descriptive representation, as they assume that the greater the number of women holding elective positions, the greater the inclusion of agendas aimed at women.

The underrepresentation of women in Parliament can hinder the increase of proposals on topics related to the female universe. It is essential to strengthen substantive representation by increasing the number of female deputies to intensify the debate on feminist and women's agendas. Additionally, it is crucial to broaden the understanding of the content of proposals that address women's issues, as the themes of these projects intersect with various sectors of society where women seek to overcome gender inequality. However, there is no problem if a man shows greater involvement with women's issues than a woman, as both genders should act equitably about the various topics proposed by lawmakers.

However, women are still a minority in the legislature, which emphasizes that increasing the number of female deputies could favor greater acceptance of feminist and women's agendas, resulting in favorable opinions in committees and the plenary, increasing interest in their approval, and benefiting gender politics. Even in cases where the female deputy does not have a direct interest in these agendas, she can advocate for these issues and contribute to strengthening policies aimed at women in Congress.

In light of this, the following tables present data on the relationship between projects with feminist and women's agendas, considering the thematic area, type of authorship, status of the proposal (archived, in progress, and approved), reasons for archiving, and the parties of the deputies. This data contributes to understanding the nature of matters that address women-related subjects.

The following table presents the relationship between the thematic area and projects that address feminist and women's agendas. Although these agendas generally aim to address women's issues, it is possible to observe the interaction of these proposals with various thematic areas such as education, the world of work, health, and violence, among others. Through this

analysis, we can identify the content of these projects beyond the gender issue, that is, how these agendas can impact various sectors of society and mobilize the interests of women's groups and feminist movements that seek gender equality and representation of their demands. See the table below:

**Table 3** - Projects proposed by female deputies aggregated from the legislatures of 2003-2007, 2007-2011, and 2011-2015 by thematic area and feminist and women's agendas

| Thematic area of proposed projects                               | Feminist agendas |            | Women's docket |            |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|------------|----------------|------------|
|                                                                  | N                | %          | N              | %          |
| Administration and Public Service                                | 3                | 1          | -              | -          |
| Social Assistance                                                | 6                | 3          | -              | -          |
| Civil Code                                                       | -                | -          | 3              | 7          |
| Traffic Code, Transportation, and Transit                        | -                | -          | 1              | 2          |
| Electoral Code, Party Organization, Referendums, and Plebiscites | 16               | 7          | -              | -          |
| Criminal Code and Violence                                       | 35               | 15         | 1              | 2          |
| Consumer Affairs                                                 | -                | -          | 1              | 2          |
| Children and Adolescents                                         | 5                | 2          | 1              | 2          |
| Human Rights                                                     | 2                | 1          | -              | -          |
| Economy, Finance, and Taxation                                   | 3                | 1          | -              | -          |
| Education                                                        | 3                | 1          | -              | -          |
| Sports                                                           | 1                | 0          | 3              | 7          |
| Gender                                                           | 58               | 25         | 4              | 10         |
| Other                                                            | 15               | 6          | -              | -          |
| Racial and Ethnic Issues                                         | 2                | 1          | -              | -          |
| Rural and Land Issues                                            | 2                | 1          | -              | -          |
| Health                                                           | 22               | 9          | 20             | 48         |
| Public Safety                                                    | -                | -          | 1              | 2          |
| Labor                                                            | 59               | 25         | 7              | 17         |
| <b>Total</b>                                                     | <b>232</b>       | <b>100</b> | <b>42</b>      | <b>100</b> |

Source: Compiled by the author with data from the National Congress portal.

In Table 3, it can be observed that projects addressing feminist issues account for 15% of the propositions related to the criminal code and violence, 25% are about gender, 9% address health, and 25% are focused on work. These themes make up a total of 74% of the propositions addressing these topics. Regarding projects dedicated to the feminist theme, 10% are devoted to it, 48% to health, and 17% to work. These themes account for 75% of the propositions related to these issues.

These data reveal that feminist and women-focused agendas address topics related to work, gender, health, criminal code, and violence. These themes reflect the reality of Brazilian women who seek to reduce gender inequality in the workforce, have dignified access to healthcare, particularly in issues such as abortion and women's preventive health, and reduce the number of femicides in the country. It is essential to highlight the percentage of propositions related to feminist issues, which underscores the importance of various women's movements and associations that aim to give voice to women's political demands.

Regarding the topics addressed in the aforementioned thematic areas, projects with feminist agendas deal with the social security rights of domestic workers, sexual harassment against women in the workplace, combating gender discrimination in the professional environment, equal pay between men and women, employer-provided nursery or daycare for children under five years old, voluntary sterilization for both men and women, public policies for women, abortion, use of the female image, gender discrimination or prejudice, and homoaffective and homophobic issues.

Additionally, they address violence against women, with a focus on domestic violence, and issues related to health, such as medical assistance for incarcerated women, rights of pregnant women, postpartum and postpartum period, distribution of female condoms, sexual orientation, prevention of sexually transmitted diseases and drug use, and rights of women with HIV. As for projects with agendas for women, they address topics related to women's health, the prevention and treatment of breast and uterine cancer, and specific vaccination for females.

In Table 20, it is possible to observe the thematic areas that address only one of the agendas above. In the case of feminist agendas, the following themes stand out: administration and public service, social assistance, electoral code, party organization, referendums and plebiscites, human rights, economy, finance and taxation, education, and others (commemorative dates, tributes, and designations), racial and ethnic issues, rural and land issues. Regarding agendas for women, the following themes are highlighted: civil code, traffic code, transportation, consumer rights, and public security.

Thus, female deputies who propose projects with themes related to feminist agendas and agendas for women contribute to the reduction of gender inequality in the workplace, the defense of women against violence, and the guarantee of maternal rights. The involvement of female parliamentarians with these issues allows for a broader debate within women's groups and movements in Parliament, providing women with a more consolidated and less unequal space in society.

The following table presents the relationship between projects with feminist and women's agendas and the type of authorship, that is, whether the propositions addressing these subjects were proposed by a main author, an author with co-authorship, or a co-author.

**Table 4** – Projects proposed by female deputies aggregated from the legislatures of 2003-2007, 2007-2011, and 2011-2015 by feminist and women's agendas and type of authorship

| Authorship Type           | Feminist Agendas |     | Women's Agendas |     |
|---------------------------|------------------|-----|-----------------|-----|
|                           | N                | %   | N               | %   |
| Main Author               | 197              | 85  | 39              | 93  |
| Author with co-authorship | 25               | 11  | 3               | 7   |
| Co-author                 | 10               | 4   | -               | -   |
| Total                     | 232              | 100 | 42              | 100 |

Source: Compiled by the author with data from the National Congress portal.

Table 4 reveals that 85% of the proposed projects with feminist agendas are authored solely by a single author, while 93% of the proposed projects with agendas for women are also authored solely by a single author. This percentage decreases when it comes to projects with co-authorship, representing 11% of the projects with feminist agendas and 3% with dockets for women. Furthermore, the percentage is even lower in projects co-signed by the deputies, with 4% of the propositions with feminist agendas and 0% of the recommendations with agendas for women.

In this context, the data presented in the table above indicates that, despite the low percentage of projects proposed by the deputies regarding women's interests, they stand out as pioneers in this regard, as most of these propositions are presented with sole authorship. These data reflect Young's study (2006), which advocates for advancing minority groups in politics. In the case of women, an increase in representatives in the political space allows for an opening for the discussion of topics related to women, facilitating the proposition and defense of these agendas by the female gender. Thus, women's participation in politics contributes to increasing female representatives in the political space and strengthens the substantive representation of minority groups.

The following data indicate the status of the bills with feminist agendas and agendas for women, whether archived, in progress or transformed into legal norms.

**Table 5** - Projects proposed by female deputies aggregated from the legislatures of 2003-2007, 2007-2011, and 2011-2015 by feminist and women's agendas and project status

| Project Status   | Feminist Agendas |     | Women's Agendas |     |
|------------------|------------------|-----|-----------------|-----|
|                  | N                | %   | N               | %   |
| Archived         | 117              | 50  | 19              | 45  |
| In progress      | 101              | 44  | 20              | 48  |
| Enacted into law | 14               | 6   | 3               | 7   |
| Total            | 232              | 100 | 42              | 100 |

Source: Compiled by the author using data from the National Congress portal.

Table 5 reveals that 50% of projects with feminist agendas have been archived, 44% are still under consideration, and 6% have been enacted into law. As for projects with agendas for women, 45% have been archived, 48% are still under consideration, and 7% have been enacted into law. The status of projects for both agendas is similar, with approximately 50% of projects being archived, which also applies to projects related to other dockets addressed in this study.

The following table presents the relationship between the thematic areas of proposed and approved projects addressing feminist and women's agendas.

**Table 6** - Projects proposed and approved by female deputies aggregated from the legislatures of 2003-2007, 2007-2011, and 2011-2015 by thematic area and feminist and women's agendas

| Approved project thematic areas                    | Feminist Agendas |     | Women's Agendas |     |
|----------------------------------------------------|------------------|-----|-----------------|-----|
|                                                    | N                | %   | N               | %   |
| Criminal Code and violence                         | 3                | 21  | -               | -   |
| Sports                                             | -                | -   | 1               | 33  |
| Gender                                             | 3                | 21  | -               | -   |
| Others (commemorative dates, honors, designations) | 7                | 50  | -               | -   |
| Labor                                              | 1                | 7   | -               | -   |
| Health                                             | -                | -   | 2               | 67  |
| Total                                              | 14               | 100 | 3               | 100 |

Source: Compiled by the author using data from the National Congress portal.

Table 6 indicates that feminist agendas account for 50% of the approved propositions in the "Others" category (commemorative dates, honors, designations), 21% in the Criminal Code and Violence category, 21% in the Gender category, and 7% in the Labor category. As for agendas for women, 67% of the approved propositions focus on health, and 33% are related to sports.

Regarding the content and authorship of projects that have been transformed into legal norms, in the legislature from 2003 to 2007, 7 projects were approved. Deputy Iara Bernardi - PT/SP was the author of 2 propositions addressing sexual and domestic violence against women, Iriny Lopes - PT/ES was the author of the proposition on violence against women, Laura Carneiro - PFL/RJ was the author of the proposition declaring writer Rose Marie Muraro as the Patroness of National Feminism, Luiza Erundina - PSB/SP was the author of the proposal on pregnant women, and Rose Freitas - PMDB/ES was the author of the propositions designating the National Day of Human Rights and establishing the National Day of Traditional Midwives. In the legislature from 2007 to 2011, a request by Deputy Alice Portugal - PCdoB/BA was approved, which focused on labor and banned the intimate search of women in the workplace. In the legislature, from 2011 to 2015, 6 projects were approved. Deputy Ana Arraes - PSB/PE was the author of the proposition honoring Bárbara Pereira de Alencar, Luiza Erundina - PSB/SP was the author of the proposal on internet violence (amendment to the Carolina Dickmann Law), Manuela D'Avila - PCdoB/RS was a co-author of the proposition on internet violence (amendment to the Carolina Dickmann Law), Mara Gabrilli - PSDB/SP was a co-author of the proposal on sports (special pension for athlete Laís Souza), and Sandra Rosada - PSB/SP was the author of the propositions honoring Clara Felipa Camarão and Jovita Alves Feitosa.

In relation to the 66 projects on the topic of work, only one project was approved. This shows that, despite female representatives being more active in this area, projects are not supported at the same rate as proposed. Issues related to violence against women receive more attention in this space than those related to women in the professional world. However, female deputies are creating space for this topic, representing a significant advancement for women.

Themes that address feminist and women's agendas are considered secondary in the parliamentary debate, as there is greater interest among lawmakers and their factions in proposing topics in the areas of work and economy. Therefore, even if male parliamentarians offer projects on these topics when they assume positions such as committee rapporteurs, they

may not have the same understanding of the subject matter as a woman would. This can lead to early vetoing of the project in the legislative process and hinder gender politics.

According to Franceschet (2008), female parliamentarians seek to incorporate gender issues into party policies, engage with public agencies that address the topic, and participate in women's groups and organizations. In this case, it is essential to understand the demand that female deputies receive regarding gender, what women's movements and groups are advocating for, and the interest of these topics for the deputies.

According to Urbinati (2006a, 2006b), it is essential to understand the connections between the State and society, how these spheres communicate, and how their interests flow in politics. Despite the low percentage of projects addressing gender issues, female parliamentarians play a substantial role by actively engaging in the legislative process, addressing topics previously seen as exclusively male, such as economy, finance, and taxation. The following table presents the relationship between the reason for archiving and the feminist and women's agendas of the projects based on the data shown below:

**Table 7** - Projects proposed by female deputies archived, aggregated from the legislatures of 2003-2007, 2007-2011, and 2011-2015, by feminist and women's agendas and reason for archiving

| Reason for archiving the project                                                               | Feminist Agendas |            | Women's Agendas |            |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|------------|-----------------|------------|
|                                                                                                | N                | %          | n               | %          |
| Requested by the project's author                                                              | 9                | 8          | -               | -          |
| Expired deadline for project appeal                                                            | 5                | 4          | -               | -          |
| Lack of project re-submission by the author                                                    | 3                | 3          | 1               | 5          |
| Project rejected in committee                                                                  | 11               | 9          | 5               | 26         |
| Project vetoed in committee or in plenary                                                      | -                | -          | -               | -          |
| Project archived due to the end of the legislative term                                        | 67               | 57         | 9               | 47         |
| Unconstitutionality and/or lack of legality; financial and budgetary inadequacy of the project | 1                | 1          | -               | -          |
| Project damaged                                                                                | 21               | 18         | 4               | 21         |
| <b>Total</b>                                                                                   | <b>117</b>       | <b>100</b> | <b>19</b>       | <b>100</b> |

Source: Compiled by the author using data from the National Congress portal.

Table 7 indicates that, regarding projects with feminist agendas, 57% of them were archived due to the end of the legislative term. In these cases, there was no interest from the project's author and other lawmakers to request the reactivation of the proposal. Additionally, 18% of the projects were damaged by the committee. As for projects with agendas for women, 47% were archived due to the end of the legislative term, the committee rejected 26% due to disagreement among members regarding the content of the matter, and 21% were considered damaged by the committee.

Another relevant fact is that neither the feminist nor the women-oriented agendas had projects archived due to vetoes in committees or plenary sessions. This is significant considering the gender inequality in our country and the predominantly male environment in the Federal Legislative Chamber. Generally, proposals addressing women's issues flow naturally through the legislative process in the legislatures covered in this study.

Analyzing the data of projects with feminist agendas and those for women, we observe that all these propositions were referred to the respective committees responsible for the relevant topics. When a project is considered damaged or rejected, resulting in its archiving, we can conclude that it is in the committees where these projects become stagnant, according to Diniz (1999, p. 62, our translation).

The committee system is the optimal unit for decision-making because it reduces external risks, with no or minimal increase in decision costs compared to assembly costs. It produces a positive-sum outcome for the general public and enables substantive minorities (ethnic, religious, etc.) to have a higher probability of obtaining approval for their preferences in committees.

The following table shows the relationship between the parties of the female deputies and their projects with feminist and women's agendas.



**Table 8** - Projects proposed by female deputies aggregated from the legislatures of 2003-2007, 2007-2011, and 2011-2015 by feminist and women-oriented agendas and parties

| Party         | Projects with feminist agendas |            | Projects with agendas for women |            |
|---------------|--------------------------------|------------|---------------------------------|------------|
|               | N                              | %          | N                               | %          |
| DEM           | 1                              | -          | -                               | -          |
| PCdoB         | 31                             | 13         | 6                               | 14         |
| PDT           | 10                             | 4          | 1                               | 2          |
| PFL           | 26                             | 11         | 2                               | 5          |
| PL            | 2                              | 1          | 1                               | 2          |
| PMDB          | 32                             | 14         | 6                               | 14         |
| PMN           | 1                              | -          | 1                               | 2          |
| PP            | 9                              | 4          | 1                               | 2          |
| PPS           | 5                              | 2          | 4                               | 10         |
| PR            | 7                              | 3          | 1                               | 2          |
| PSB           | 20                             | 9          | 4                               | 10         |
| PSC           | 2                              | 1          | -                               | -          |
| PSDB          | 10                             | 4          | 4                               | 10         |
| PSOL          | 2                              | 1          | -                               | -          |
| PT            | 68                             | 29         | 11                              | 26         |
| PTdoB         | 2                              | 1          | -                               | -          |
| PV            | 3                              | 1          | -                               | -          |
| Without Party | 1                              | -          | -                               | -          |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>232</b>                     | <b>100</b> | <b>42</b>                       | <b>100</b> |

Source: Compiled by the author using data from the National Congress portal.

Table 8 shows that regarding the percentage of projects addressing feminist agendas, PT congresswomen proposed 29% of the proposals, followed by PMDB with 14%, PCdoB with 13%, PFL with 11%, and PSB with 9%. As for agendas for women, PT congresswomen proposed 26% of the propositions, followed by PCdoB and PMDB with 14%, PPS and PSB with 10%, and PSDB with 10%. These data reveal that congresswomen from PCdoB, PPS, PMDB, and PT stand out in the percentage of projects for both agendas, while representatives from PPS and PSDB stand out only in agendas for women. The fact that representatives work on both dockets or only one may be related, among other factors, to party influence in addressing topics that promote the interests of minorities, such as women.

According to Figueiredo and Limongi (1999), the transfer of legislative responsibilities to the Executive Branch and party leaders contributes to the centralization of the decision-making process due to the recurring practice of forming broad governmental coalitions. According to the authors, this structure allows the Executive to establish the rhythm and content of the legislative agenda. As a result, legislators are limited in legislating in substantive policy areas and cannot meet their constituents' interests.

Figueiredo and Limongi (1999) also address party influence in Parliament, arguing that the principle adopted for the distribution of parliamentary rights is party-based, meaning that parties distribute positions according to the strength of their caucuses. The majority party holds the presidency of the chamber. Additionally, the composition of technical committees follows the principle of party proportionality, and party leaders do the distribution of parliamentarians in committees. The internal regulations recognize the existence of the leaders' group, which plays an essential role in determining the agenda of the proceedings. In this context, although the Executive does not have full support from its party bases, it does not encounter an insurmountable obstacle in Congress to implement its agenda.

By prioritizing women in this analysis, we are altering how we examine legislative production and its consequences. Despite being basic, some presented data are essential for mapping female legislative activity and contributing to the literature dealing with practical women's representation in politics.

In this situation, female representatives exercise their parliamentary function to the same extent as their male counterparts. This data is evidenced when analyzing the type of authorship of a project, with over 50% of proposals being presented as the principal authors. It is also observed that most female representatives follow their propositions and intervene when necessary through requests, aiming to advance their matters in the legislative process.

Gender-related issues are not prioritized on their agendas. Transforming a proposition into legal norms is a complex process, as many propose amendments to existing laws or present new laws, implying changes to the Constitution that affect various sectors of society and the State.

For scholars in the field of legislation, who address the quality of legal norms, the delay in the processing of propositions also depends on the content of the matter, especially when they involve changes to the Federal Constitution. In the case of less comprehensive proposals, the delay is unjustified as it diverts focus from the proposition. However, it is necessary to ensure the participation of different segments of society, such as minority parliamentarians, which may prolong the processing process.

Regarding the effective representation of women, it is observed that an increase in the number of female representatives can contribute to the discussion of gender-related and minority issues, as the interests of the majority groups prevail in the political sphere. Law number 11.340, known as the Maria da Penha Law, dated August 7, 2006, originated from a project proposed in 2004 addressing the issue of domestic violence and offering the creation of

mechanisms to combat domestic and family violence against women. This law gained worldwide recognition as it bears the name of a Brazilian woman who suffered domestic violence and was left paralyzed due to that attack. This woman began to fight against this type of violence and sought to make the law more effective in such cases. This project was transformed into legal norms and currently represents an essential link between the public sphere and society. Although the project was not proposed by a woman but rather by the initiative of the Executive Branch during the government of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, it is important to note that the rapporteur of the proposition was Deputy Jandira Feghali/PCdoB.

Even with a reduced number of propositions addressing gender-related issues, for feminist and women's groups, it is essential for elected female representatives to engage in areas predominantly occupied by male parliamentarians, as the demands of these groups aim to achieve gender equality in the world of work and financial matters. Therefore, even if the mentioned projects do not directly benefit underrepresented groups, the presence of women in the debate can already be considered progress for women.

#### 4. Final Considerations

In the Brazilian case, women are significantly underrepresented in Parliament. On the other hand, women tend to participate in social movements and groups and engage in party activities. However, access to politics is still limited by cultural, familial, and gender inequalities and other factors that hinder the increase of female presence in elected positions.

Elected female representatives face difficulties occupying leadership positions within political parties and in Parliament, with few women on the executive board or permanent committees. This leads us to question whether women must achieve something unique to enter this political space. This requirement does not apply in the same way to men.

In this context, the representative process, based on the substantive representation that encourages new interests and opinions, requires greater political engagement, which can be promoted through participation in social movements and associations. According to the research addressed in this study, women's interests are diverse and encompass various areas such as violence, health, and education, among others. Therefore, social movements and other groups are ways to bring women closer to politics.

In this regard, the objective is not to determine whether women exclusively promote women's issues, as they may not share the same interests, but rather to analyze whether the

parliamentary activity of female representatives impacts gender-related matters or if the topic influences their political behavior. Studies of Brazilian female deputies show that these parliamentarians may have different interests from the female electorate and include other concerns in their agendas.

The affirmative policy of quotas raises a theoretical discussion about the relationship between descriptive representation and substantive representation, that is, to what extent an increase in the number of women in Parliament contributes to the representation of women's interests in that space. There has been an increase in the number of female candidacies in Brazil, but in the legislatures covered in this study, there is only a slight increase in the number of women in Parliament compared to previous congresses.

Female deputies have prioritized areas such as economy, finance, taxation, and labor, which makes it interesting to investigate the demands of women's groups and movements, such as their claims and whether the female representatives are addressing these issues. In this study, we have mapped what has been produced, but future studies can explore the connection between the state and society, verifying whether the agendas of specific feminist movements and women's groups are being incorporated into the parliamentary agendas of female representatives and identify the acceptance in the legislature.

The obstacles that hinder substantive representation of women are related to the presence of these women in Parliament, as the underrepresentation of this group affects legislative production and the defense of women's rights. These discrepancies are evidenced by the low percentage of seats occupied by women in the state delegations and the parties of female parliamentarians. Even in states and parties with higher female representation, women are still a minority compared to men.

There is still a long way to go in overcoming the underrepresentation of women in politics. In addition to women, other minority groups are seeking substantive representation. Thus, this research contributes to debunking the stereotypes that women only work in motherhood and caregiving areas and are not prepared for the political environment. They are playing a substantive role in their parliamentary work and actively engaging with the dynamics of the Parliament. Therefore, it is important to strengthen policies that promote female participation in politics, as an increase in the number of women impacts both the number of projects and their repercussions in the legislative process.

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