

Race, Gender and Class Relationships in Brazilian elections

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We'll discuss race, gender, and class relationships in Brazilian elections. Our main objective is to discuss the participation pattern of women and Negroes in their struggle to obtain political power in Brazil. Right after that, we'll see factors that more often explain gender and race inequality in local politics. Let's see Table 1 which presents a little bit of world gender inequality.

It's important to emphasize that gender inequality when seen in politics, is part of a picture of total society. For instance, today we have 51% of world population comprised of women, 49% of men. But when we consider productive and reproductive power and communitarian work we see that 70% of that is in the hands of women, 30%, of men. When we refer to wages circulation in the world what a disparity! 90% of these wages are in the hands of men while only 10% are in the hands of women. The bulk of this inequality is revealed in ownership of production means.

We see 99% of ownership in the hands of men. And the detail is that when we see that men own production means they also own political power in the world. The largest part, or 96%, of functions with political power is exercised by men. On the other hand it's important to emphasize that whenever we notice men and women inequality, women tend to occupy much lower positions.

Now, regarding acquisition of advantages inequality conditions in the access to resources we often have women in terrible conditions. Poor people in the world, three fourths of it are comprised by women. And when we deal with the illiterate population two thirds are women. This is a general picture that ends up reflected in politics. When we consider Brazil, situation isn't too different. Brazilian population is comprised of 51% of women. When we consider those economically active 60% of those are men.

The bulk of this inequality is evident in wages. Men usually tend to be paid higher wages than women whites tend to be paid better wages than nonwhites. And what's curious here, as we noticed in Table 2 is that white women are paid better wages than

Negro women. And though it may seem unbelievable twice more than Negro men. This may be noticed in Table 2.

It's interesting that, regarding extreme inequality situations we see 92% of those absorbed in the domestic working market are women. Only 7.8% are men in this condition. When we consider jobs with political power we have a curious disclosure not far from world pattern. But, in the Brazilian case, it reveals extreme disparity. In our national Congress we have 5.7% of women and 94% of men. And in Brazilian cities from a total of 4,974 cities only 3.5% are governed by women.

When we analyze this picture, we see that very often, women occupy less than 10% of political functions. Something even stronger if we have access inequality to goods and resources. Social conditions of women are really precarious in Brazil. About 70% of domestic violence regards women. Among men, only 20% state to have suffered such violence. Women in general don't take up as breadwinners. Only 30% of them are listed as breadwinners. This condition leads to general inequality and ends up being unfolded in the politics area. This is the picture in Brazil.

When we observe distribution of candidates elected to political power functions in federal level, both congressmen and senators in 2002 elections we see extreme disparities in opportunities for women, an interesting fact for us to notice. And the important characteristic is that left parties have been the best vehicle of access to political power for women. Among those parties, the one with more importance is PT. Among the 54 women who got political function in the Congress or Senate, 35% of those had access to it through PT. The total indicates more chance for left party's women to achieve political power. 50% of them are from left parties. Among those, the Communist Party the Communist Party of Brazil and mainly PT are references.

Table 4 presents a synthesis of candidates elected to Congress according to gender in 2002. This table is very revealing of what we can understand in terms of inequality on access opportunities to political power. Today we have 513 congressmen in Congress. From this number, 45 are women. This corresponds to 8.7% of seats. In the Senate, there are 81 seats. Only 9 women have access to this function a percentage of 11%.

In the total, we have 594 Senators and Congressmen and those only 9% are women. That's really revealing especially when we observe that men have 90% of the seats. It's worth evaluating; now what factors can explain these disparities. Four factors are

emphasized in the literature dealing with racial and gender disparities in Brazil. In this sense it's worth reminding that I'm not emphasizing many racial disparities because data are scarce. And an important factor is that, according to numbers Negro presence in Congress is much inferior to women's. They are less than 10% of the women.

And factors explaining access difficulties are four. The first factor regards racial and gender stereotypes. Many authors describe that since Negroes and women are seen as passive, irrational and emotionally unstable beings, access is harder for them. In this case, these stereotypes lead electors to expect that they wouldn't be fit to exercise this role.

The second factor is a restrict supply of candidates. The most common explanation is that due to prejudice. Negroes and women would feel discouraged to join political parties and run in elections. In a previous evaluation, their chances would be minimal.

The third factor regards lack of political experience and an amateur style of politics. This is an important characteristic because since these candidates, women and Negroes often come from organizations, social movements and unions they wouldn't have political party experience and thus the necessary experience to run using resources and mobilizing party support. It's exactly this lack of political experience and the fact that they base their campaign basically on the solidarity of friends, neighbors, colleagues that make these candidates be considered inexperienced with a style on politics making that's absolutely amateur.

Finally, the main factor. that most intellectuals and politics analysts notice as the main factor to explain inequality on politics and racial participation in Brazil has been the presence of political parties. They're considered the gate keepers to political functions. In the American language currently used in American literature. The "gate keepers" analysts evaluate that these parties would exercise the function of ruling access, recruiting and distribution of resources to political campaigns. Since Negroes and women are neophytes in politics without expertise on political participation they'd be excluded from the relationship network and advantages offered by these parties.

Since we're talking about parties and their importance to regulate access to the politics world it's worth observing an aspect of political parties in Brazil. This is their little strength among communities in general. You can notice little ideological definition on parties' profile. This including leads electors cannot really recognize political positions

and proposals from each party. This partially explains why candidates often join the parties on the eve of elections.

And there's no strong tradition of constant and lasting relation among candidates and parties. Finally, regardless of parties' inconsistency we notice important aspects on parties' profiles. Left parties have been seen as the main vehicle of access of women to politics. These usually are parties with a strong ideological appeal and mainly an appeal to class, gender, racial identities. This favors that candidates like women and Negroes and those connected to social and work movements find in these parties their main vehicle of expression and a possibility to appeal to a large segment of voters.

Right parties on the other hand tend to be very inconsistent in ideological terms. Candidates of these parties tend to personal appeals political patronage and they are fragile on party loyalty. This is a strong image regarding political parties in Brazil. And a large number of these explanations show these candidates' difficulties to access such parties.

Now, to illustrate somewhat Brazilian inequality pattern I'm going to analyze a case study I made on '92 elections which to this date, despite time gone by is still a parameter since Brazilian experience presents little transformations as to access patterns for Negroes and women to politics. In order to illustrate somewhat inequality patterns in Brazil, I've put aside for you a discussion on a case on political participation research in the elections held in Salvador, in 1992. This has to do specifically with candidates to councilman.

In that event, there were 1,154 candidates and from this total 88.5% were men, 11.5% were women. This shows to us immediately something of the previous table. A low percentage of women running in this election and we should consider the profile of these women. The main aspect is that most of the women running were women with a higher degree in education single or divorced, teachers, public officers and who had joined the party shortly prior to the election.

The interesting aspect is noticing that those women in politics are usually people without family bonds like marriage, and few children, something important. Another aspect that's worth commenting is that they come from occupations related to services, or typically feminine tasks like teachers, public officials, social service workers. From these candidates, 67% had those occupations.

Now let's consider the profile of Negro candidates. This is a relevant datum, since it's often said that we don't have Negro candidates and this could explain it. In the case of Negroes this is not a convincing reason for their lack of success. In 1992 elections about 54% of the candidates was Negro and 34%, white. The rest were mulattoes. When we analyze their profile, we notice something revealing of the participating pattern of Negro politicians in Brazil. They are usually candidates with a high school degree. A large part, almost 50%, studied only up to high school. They come from the working class; they're employees semi specialized, usually linked to professional groups with strong union support. And an interesting fact is that those candidates often come from neighborhoods that lack goods and services like health, water, energy, sanitation. Maybe even this lack of services where they live might explain why they join politics.

Now, when we compare Negro and white candidates we notice perfectly distinct profiles. White candidates tend to be liberal professionals, entrepreneurs, people of a higher level from medium or medium high classes. While Negro candidates tend to a typical profile xxx of public officers, employees, teachers linked to areas that aggregate large professional corporations. And this election reveals an interesting aspect. Although there were 1,154 candidates running it's appalling to notice that only 10% of them had real chances to run for this political function.

This reveals something curious. Even in elections with lots of candidates a thousand or more we see absolute exclusion of a mass of those candidates. In Salvador's local election we had at least 42% with a very low number of ballots. Less than 200 ballots. From this total, 60% constituted of Negroes. What we see here is little candidate competitiveness. As a conclusion, we observe that from candidates that were effectively elected a typical profile is crystal, as seen in the political world. They are usually men, married, of higher education levels aged between 35 and 65 of liberal occupations, medium class. Usually, they already have a political function as 50% of them were coming from the city council 57% were white 34%, Negroes, and 8.6%, mulattoes.

And reasons for this number of women and Negroes are due to the factors I'm going to list now. First of all, characteristics and interpretation point out that political parties have not faced this challenge to stimulate feminine and Negro participation in their numbers. In the Brazilian case, we have legislation that commands political

parties to have at least 30% of their numbers constituted of women. But many of them don't take it seriously, they circumvent the law. Few parties adopt the quota policy. Besides, parties have no clear definition as to resources to be used in their campaigns.

Another important factor to characterize and stress the profile of Brazilian political parties is that they are oligarchies, patriarchal institutions whose formation tends to make it impossible for women to be in politics. In this case it's interesting to highlight lack of democracy and access to political power.

Another very important factor to be emphasized present in international literature interpretation is that the political system for elections is a huge factor to define inclusion or exclusion of groups in society. In the case of Brazil, Brazilian political system is extremely limited to elites and it favors individuals with more financial resources and access to power and campaign financing.

The option to follow a political career is too expensive. Without financial resources, without access to power without means to participate in day to day political activities along with parties, unions, social movements besides the fact that they are absorbed in domestic chores women participation faces a lot of obstacles. These are gender inequality patterns that also reveal a lot of racial inequality indicating that it would be important to change the law in order to create a series of social assistance services that would allow for the women to overcome their barriers and enter political life.

Another factor that would add a lot to cancel disparities would be a change in family patterns. As well as counting on a network of social security and support so that women could be free from domestic chores. In this case, women's liberation to go into politics requires a supporting network, day care, recreation, education centers laundry services, popular restaurants. And most of all to change family relationship. Lastly, it's crucial to rebuild political activities so that they may be chosen by excluded groups, like women.

Finally it's important to emphasize, now the big challenge to disclose feminine political platforms so that candidates could include them in their political agendas defining better and more effectively new areas for activity in gender and racial relationships.