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Political participation of women and electoral competitiveness in the State of Mexico

Participación política de las mujeres y competitividad electoral en el Estado de México

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Abstract: The central argument of this paper is that electoral competitiveness is currently the main challenge for the political participation of women in Mexico. Thus, and based on the theory of the new institutionalism, it is analyzed how electoral reforms in matters of gender, from those that guaranteed voting to those that mandate equal integration, as well as the methodology of competitiveness blocks, represent mechanisms that promote the insertion of more women in popular vote positions. Finally, a series of adjustments are proposed to the conformation of the competitiveness blocks to improve their results.

Key Words: Competitiveness blocks, institutional design, elections, political participation, gender parity.

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Resumen: El argumento principal del artículo se centra en que la competitividad electoral es actualmente, el principal desafío para la participación política de la mujer en México. Para ello, y con base en la teoría del nuevo institucionalismo, se analiza cómo las reformas electorales en materia de género, desde aquellas que garantizaron el voto hasta las que obligan a la integración paritaria, así como la metodología de los bloques de competitividad, son mecanismos que favorecen la inserción de más mujeres en cargos de elección popular. Finalmente, se propone una serie de ajustes a la conformación de los bloques de competitividad para mejorar sus resultados.



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Palabras clave: bloques de competitividad, diseño institucional, elecciones, participación política, paridad de género.

INTRODUCTION

The recognition, and even more so, the full exercise of women's political-electoral rights in Mexico has been gradual. Only in the last few years has women's political participation made notable progress. The long journey to achieve formal and, above all, substantive equality in women's participation in public affairs began at the dawn of Mexico's twentieth century. Almost a century after the recognition of women's electoral rights began, obstacles and challenges persist to guarantee effective parity in bodies of popular representation and decision-making spaces. Therefore, it is not inaccurate to point out that in our country there has been a limited political participation for female citizens.

As has been widely documented, the recognition of women's right to vote arose at the state level. Yucatán, in 1922, followed by Chiapas, in 1925, and San Luis Potosí, in 1927, were the first states to issue local legislation establishing women's right to vote (Cuarta Visitaduría General, 2020, p. 29). Subsequently, in 1953 the right of women to active suffrage, that is to say, to cast their vote, was established at the constitutional level and, no less relevant, especially to characterize the slow progress of the matter at the legislative level; it was until 1974 when our Carta Magna recognized the legal equality of women and men. However, in the electoral sphere itself, it was not until the 1990s that the first legislative provisions arose, first to promote, and then to guarantee greater political participation of women (Elizondo Gasperín, 2011).

How was it possible to expand the horizons of women's political participation in our country? Undoubtedly, there is a positive relationship with respect to the process of democratization of power in Mexico that changed our political and electoral dynamics to move, among other elements, from a hegemonic party system to a system of competitive pluralism (Núñez Jiménez, 2019). But also, electoral institutions, and more specifically their redesign, were fundamental to make way for women and close the existing gender gaps.

The centrality of institutional design is the main argument of this paper, as it is known from the premise, that the substantive increase in women's political participation did not take place within the same rules that existed a few decades ago. Instead, changes in the institutional framework encouraged political actors and parties to allow greater participation of women. The purpose of this statement is to draw attention to the importance of institutions, above and beyond isolated decision making, in order to generate changes in electoral behavior. For this reason, the need arises to study in detail the institutional design and its possibilities for change, in order to move towards a better representation of women in democratically elected bodies.

To bring the discussion to current times, it can be observed that (once the political-electoral rights of women have been recognized, as well as their participation within political parties and in the electoral offer as candidates) the most pressing challenge has been related to their real competitiveness. As has been observed in recent experience, by requiring that a certain percentage of candidacies be allocated to women -quota system-, political parties placed women in electoral districts or municipalities where they had little chance of winning. From this practice arose the need to devise the so-called "bloques de competitividad" or competitive blocks, which established criteria for women candidates to participate in districts where the nominating party had a certain probability of winning.

Based on the above, the objective of this paper is to analyze the implementation of the competitive blocks in the 2021 local electoral process in the State of Mexico, as well as the challenges they posed. Likewise, a proposal for an expanded interpretation of such blocks is presented to improve their criteria in favor of the political participation of female candidates in the State of Mexico. To this end, the paper is divided into four sections. The first deals theoretically with the importance of institutional designs and their impact on the modification of political behavior. The second section makes a brief historical review of the evolution of women's political participation in our country. The third part of the paper examines the emergence of competitive blocks, as well as their main results. Subsequently, the fourth section analyzes the progress and challenges of the competitiveness blocks in our state. Finally, and by way of conclusion, some final reflections are presented.

INSTITUTIONAL DESIGN AND WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

This section describes the theoretical bases that will guide the arguments of this paper. In this sense, the relationship between institutional design and change in the political-electoral reality is highlighted, in this case, in relation to women's political participation. To this end, we debate between the explanation of change based on the political actor and the perspective that emphasizes the centrality of institutions.

How did women's political participation increase in Mexico? Undoubtedly, the answer to this question is closely related to the action of feminist blocks that, from the civil society, fought since the mid-twentieth century for the recognition of women's political and electoral rights and to facilitate their access to participation in public affairs (Serret, 2000). In this regard, the *Mujeres en Acción Solidaria*, *Movimiento Nacional de Mujeres* and *Movimiento de Liberación de la Mujer* organizations, stand out. However, it should be noted that these social movements and demands were located on the margins of the prevailing political regime throughout the last century. In our opinion, it was until the transformation of these demands into new institutional designs that made it possible to expand the democratic frontiers of our political-electoral system in favor of women.

Of course, this argument implies carrying out a theoretical weighing between the prevalence of the collective political actor, seen as a rational being who makes decisions seeking to maximize profits, or the prevalence of institutions, formal and informal, understood as the rules of the game that shape, encourage or discourage political behavior. To explain the above, it is relevant to return to two of the main theories that explain political reality, changes, and their results.

First, the theory of rational action, or rational choice, assumes that political actors are rational and consistently wish to maximize their gains at the lowest possible cost. Likewise, this theory considers the political actor as rational, since he or she carries out behaviors and conducts that "son producto de elecciones hechas con vistas a lograr, de la mejor manera posible, determinados fines" (Ward, 1995, p. 87). Based on these assumptions, it can be concluded that the behavior of political actors is essentially motivated by the pursuit of their personal or collective interest and that they have a preliminary knowledge of the ends they are pursuing.

A relevant characteristic of this theoretical current is that it admits that the actors possess "la capacidad racional, el tiempo y la independencia emocional para elegir la mejor línea de conducta, cualquiera que sea la complejidad de la elección" (Ward, 1995, p. 88). Under this scheme, the political actor makes decisions considering the alternative that allows him to obtain certain means that will seek to satisfy his interests. In other words, the rational actor will calculate his decisions among different available alternatives and will prioritize the one that gives him the greatest gain.

There are several reviews of this theory by Herbert Simon, among others, who was a pioneer in introducing the notion of "racionalidad limitada". For Simon, in social practice, political actors, whether individual or collective, do not possess all the elements required - time, resources, information, capacity - to make fully efficient decisions. Consequently, considering the limited resources of the actors "...las decisiones reales abarcarían (...) no todos los aspectos de la vida, sino campos parciales, tomados arbitrariamente como independientes; tampoco habría un cálculo de series detalladas a futuro; es decir, las decisiones implicarían siempre una racionalidad limitada" (De la Garza, 1994, p. 363).

While admitting the rationality of the political actor or collective action, the theory of new institutionalism focuses on the centrality of institutions in human behavior. According to North (1990, p. 3), institutions "son las reglas del juego en una sociedad o, más formalmente, son las restricciones ideadas que moldean las interacciones humanas". Thus, such constraints "estructuran los incentivos del intercambio humano, ya sea político, social o económico" (North, 1990, p. 3). More explanatorily, Peters argues that institutions "...son interpretadas como conjuntos de reglas e incentivos que fijan las condiciones para la racionalidad restringida y establecen un 'espacio político' dentro del cual pueden funcionar muchos actores interdependientes" (2003, p. 72). Thus, the thesis that the rational actor will seek to maximize his gains in pursuit of his own benefit is not rejected, but it is assumed that his possibilities are essentially limited by the set of rules or institutions within which he operates. In other words, the rational actor has limits, and these limits are called institutions.

Another substantial difference between the views of rational choice, associated with behaviorist theories, and the new institutionalism is that the latter rejects collective political action as a simple aggregation of individual choices. Instead, the emphasis on institutions emphasizes the importance of the social context in which such choices are embedded (DiMaggio and Powell, 1999, p. 34). Also, and very relevant for our argument, is that it is not inferred that institutions are the direct result of the choices of political actors or that their design is subordinated only to political will, but that the relationship is more complex and bidirectional, since both political behavior influences the shaping of institutions and, in turn, the institutional structure influences the shaping of political behavior.

If institutions are central to human behavior, both individual and collective, the study of institutional designs is equally important, since it is these that directly influence social behavior. According to Huerta, institutional design is understood as "el conjunto de preceptos vinculados entre sí para imprimir o modificar la aplicabilidad de una (o varias) 'institución(es)', reformando algunos de los derechos u obligaciones que las integran conforme a un criterio dado" (Huerta, 2002, p. 36). Institutional design is, in turn, related to or derived from constitutional design, but at a more limited level that seeks either to construct a new mode of interaction between

governors and governed, to justify a changing reality, or to correct inoperative or dysfunctional aspects.

In opting for this theoretical alternative, it is assumed that the designs or "arreglos institucionales influyen en el proceso político... [ya que] las instituciones políticas abren o cierran 'ventanas de oportunidad' para la acción política e influyen de manera significativa en la determinación de objetivos y preferencias" (Lujambio, 1995, p. 45). Thus, the political actor, individual or collective, does not carry out his behaviors or define his objectives in an isolated environment, but it is precisely the institutions that establish the framework within which these actors interact, organize themselves and relate to each other.

Now, taking into consideration this theoretical frame of reference, we can point out several elements. Since their emergence in our country and throughout the seventies and eighties, feminist collectives were rational collective actors that sought to influence decision-making to obtain, among other ends, greater political participation. However, these organizations had limited political and symbolic resources to promote their agenda, as they did not have the support of a majority of the public, in addition to the fact that feminism was not among the central issues on the public agenda, its problems were not visible and, therefore, its concerns were not a priority for decision-makers. No less important is that these decision-makers (be they mayors, governors, legislators, or public officials) were subject to a highly centralized, vertical, and hierarchical institutional structure, a product of the Mexican political system of the twentieth century.

Therefore, increasing women's political participation is a very clear historical example in the sense that it is not enough the rational action of political actors but, especially, of a favorable institutional framework for that purpose. In this sense, from a feminist institutionalist perspective, Krook (2010, p. 712) draws attention to the importance of the following three categories for institutions: 1) systemic; 2) practical; and 3) normative. Systemic institutions refer to the formal characteristics of political systems and include the laws and organizations that structure political life. On the other hand, practical institutions refer to the formal and informal practices of political elites, which, among other elements, may include criteria, perceptions and procedures for candidate selection or decision-making. Finally, normative institutions are formal and informal principles that set the values concerning the means and objectives of political life. Although the modification of such systemic institutions, practices and norms that are essentially patriarchal and not very inclusive of women and feminist demands has not been completed, the fact is that it began with greater force at the same time as the democratization process of the Mexican political system. In this regard, in the mid-1990s, and more clearly since 2000, the institutional arrangement mutated substantially to give way to more decentralized decision making, the existence of juxtaposed governments, the establishment of a plural and competitive party system, the more decisive influence of public opinion, and a more prominent role of organized civil society (Loaeza, 2010). As a result of this renewed institutional structure, women's political participation became more prominent in the public agenda and encouraged a process of political-electoral reforms in their favor.

WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN MEXICO: FROM SUFFRAGE TO PARITY

It is not superfluous to begin this section by pointing out that political participation is understood as the:

...actos y de actitudes dirigidos a influir de manera más o menos directa y más o menos legal sobre las decisiones de los detentadores del poder en el sistema político o en cada una de las organizaciones políticas, así como en su misma selección, con vistas a conservar o modificar la estructura del sistema de intereses dominante. (Pasquino, 1995, p. 180).

Based on this definition, we must consider that political participation seeks to influence not only public decision-making, but also the modification of values, perceptions, or social practices. This is closely related to the political participation of women in Mexico, who first demanded that their right to vote be recognized, but along the way have demanded respect for their dignity, their role in society and their horizons of personal development and their right to a life free of violence, all of which has implied a modification, precisely, in the values and practices of society.

Throughout the 20th century and so far in the 21st century, we can distinguish four areas in which women's political participation has been concentrated. These are, firstly, the recognition of active and passive suffrage, as well as the insertion of women in the electoral offer through the system of gender quotas and, more recently, the parity reforms. As a matter of principle, the participation of women in decisive processes of national history, such as the Independence movement, the Reform War, the successive constituent congresses, and the Mexican Revolution, is fully documented. During and after the armed phase of the latter, various feminist collectives demanded that the constituents of 1917 include women's right to vote in the new Carta Magna (Galeana, 2014, p. 19).

However, the recognition of women's right to vote would begin at the state level. The first local legislation to recognize this right was that of Yucatán, in 1922. Subsequently, it was followed by the state legislations of Chiapas, in 1925, and San Luis Potosí, in 1927 (Cuarta Visitaduría General, 2020, p. 29). Thus, the recognition of women's suffrage emerged, like other advanced legal figures, at the local level before the federal level.

Although it was in the 1920s when the right to women's suffrage was recognized at the local level, it was not until 1953, three decades later, when women's right to suffrage was established at the federal level, by virtue of the decree issued by the then President of the Republic Adolfo Ruiz Cortines. Prior to that decree, the reform to article 115 of the Constitution on February 12, 1947 recognized the right of women to vote and be voted for exclusively in municipal elections (Secretaría de Gobernación, 1947). However, the reform to article 34 of the Constitution (October 17, 1953) granted full citizenship to "los varones y las mujeres" (Secretaría de Gobernación, 1953), allowing, in fact, women to vote in any election, whether municipal, state, or federal.

After the constitutional reform that allowed women to vote, the first elections where they cast their vote were to elect federal deputies of the 43rd Legislature (1955-1958), resulting in the election of: Aurora Jiménez de Palacios, for Baja California; Remedios Albertina Ezeta, for the State of Mexico; Margarita García Flores, for Nuevo León; Guadalupe Urzúa Flores, for Jalisco,

and Marcelina Galindo Arce, for Chiapas. As for the first elected female senators, Alicia Arellano Tapia and María Lavalle Urbina, became the first female senators in our country, representing the states of Sonora and Campeche, respectively, in the 46th Legislature (from 1964 to 1967) and in the 47th Legislature (from 1967 to 1970) (Galeana, 2014, p. 28). Regarding governorships, in 1979 Griselda Álvarez Ponce de León became the first woman governor of the Mexican Republic by holding the governorship of Colima until 1985. And finally, in 1982, Rosario Ibarra de Piedra was the first woman candidate for the Presidency of Mexico.

Considering the review of historical experience, two facts can be concluded. On the one hand, progress in favor of women's political participation was very gradual, since it took about thirty years between the recognition of suffrage in state legislation and in the federal Constitution. On the other hand, women in elected office until the early 1990s competed under a legal framework practically unchanged since the 1950s. There were no gender quotas or other provisions aimed at balancing political competition between genders.

It should be noted that throughout these decades it became evident that women faced a series of obstacles that placed them at a disadvantage compared to men when they tried to participate actively in the country's public life. Formal equality alone was seen as insufficient to achieve greater equity between men and women in the political sphere. Therefore, in the 1990s, affirmative actions to achieve equity began to be conceived.

In 1993, the then Código Federal de Instituciones y Procedimientos Electorales (COFIPE) stipulated, in its Article 175, that political parties should promote, under the terms determined by their internal documents, "una mayor participación de las mujeres en la vida política del país, a través de su postulación a cargos de elección popular" (Secretaría de Gobernación, 1993, p. 23). Two elements stand out in this provision: 1) that the regulation only "promovía" women's participation in the political sphere, without being obligatory; and 2) that it would be in accordance with the internal and varied rules of each political party. In spite of being limited, this reform encouraged a determined path towards more ambitious electoral provisions in favor of women, proof of how institutions have a fundamental influence on the behavior of political actors.

Subsequently, in 1996, within the framework of a much more robust electoral reform, the discussion on gender equity led to the establishment of "cuotas de género". As we know, these are part of the so-called affirmative actions, which consist of compensatory measures established by law to balance the existing under-representation of certain social or minority groups, in this case women. Thus, the electoral reform of that year stated, in the twenty-second transitory provision, that political parties should consider in their statutes that candidacies "por ambos principios a diputados y senadores, no excedan el 70% para un mismo género" (Secretaría de Gobernación, 1996, p. 50). For the first time in terms of gender, and not without resistance from political institutions, the COFIPE did not leave the allocation of gender quotas to the discretion of internal party documents, but clearly indicated the percentages.

The next gender reform took place in 2002, when sections A, B and C were added to article 175 of the COFIPE. By means of this reform, it was established in the body of the law and not only in a transitory provision, the provision that the candidacies for deputies and senators of the parties or coalitions could in no case include more than 70% of proprietary candidates for the same gender. But, in addition to the same gender quota established since the 1996 reform,

section B provided that the lists of proportional representation would be integrated by segments of three candidates and that, in each of the three segments of each list, there would be a candidate of a different gender. In other words, at least one out of every three candidacies in the proportional representation segments would have to be for a woman. Equally important is that this reform established for the first time, in section C of the same article 175, the possibility of denying the registration of candidacies to political parties that did not comply with these gender provisions (Secretaría de Gobernación, 2002, pp. 2-3).

Finally, what could be considered as the last set of gender equity reforms emanating from the COFIPE occurred in 2008. This code, restructured and issued in January 2008, stated as an obligation of political parties, in its article 39, paragraph s), “garantizar la equidad y procurar la paridad de los géneros” both in their leadership bodies and in candidacies for popularly elected positions (Secretaría de Gobernación, 2008, p. 14). Likewise, in the part related to the financing of political parties, article 78, paragraph a), section V, obliged that 2% of the ordinary public financing of each political institute be destined to the training, promotion, and development of women's political leadership (Secretaría de Gobernación, 2008, p. 24).

Regarding the registration of candidacies, Article 219 of the COFIPE, without leaving aside the quota system, raised the threshold for women by providing that all applications for registration of candidacies of political parties and coalitions, both for deputies and senators, should “integrarse con al menos el cuarenta por ciento de candidatos propietarios de un mismo género, procurando llegar a la paridad” (Secretaría de Gobernación, 2008, p. 73). Likewise, Article 220 established that the lists of proportional representation should be integrated by segments of five candidates and that, in each of these segments, there should be two candidates of different genders, alternately.

Although this reform strengthened the electoral regime in favor of women, there were still some pending aspects that allowed the parties, in fact, to escape these provisions. The case of the so-called “Juanitas” of 2009 stands out, which were a group of female deputies who, once they campaigned and were elected as federal legislators, requested a leave of absence from office to make way for their alternates who were, in most cases, male (Woldeberg, 2015, p. 10). However, the new institutional configuration ensured a much greater participation of women, at least as candidates. This fact substantially benefited their representation in Congress and in other popularly elected positions, mainly at the municipal level. In other areas, such as governorships or presidential candidacies, women's participation has still been scarce. It is enough to point out that in our country only five women have been presidential candidates and there have only been 15 female governors throughout our history.

Chart 1. Make-up of the Chamber of Deputies, by gender.

Make-up of the Chamber of Deputies, by gender (%)		
Year	% of men	% of women
1991-1994	91.2%	8.8%
1994-1997	85.6%	14.4%
1997-2000	82.6%	17.4%
2000-2003	83.2%	16.8%
2003-2006	76.0%	24.0%

2006-2009	77.4%	22.6%
2009-2012	71.9%	28.1%
2012-2015	62.6%	37.4%
2015-2018	57.6%	42.4%
2018-2021	51.8%	48.2%

Source: Author's elaboration, based on information obtained from the Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres (2019, p. 9).

Chart 2. Make-up of the Senate of the Republic, by gender.

Make-up of the Senate of the Republic, by gender (%)		
Year	% of men	% of women
2000-2006	84.4%	15.6%
2006-2012	82.8%	17.2%
2012-2018	74.0%	36.0%
2018-2024	50.8%	49.2%

Source: Author's elaboration, based on information obtained from the Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres (2019, p. 12).

Finally, the electoral reform that gave a decisive boost to women's political participation in Mexico was that of 2014, which also replaced the former Instituto Federal Electoral with the current Instituto Nacional Electoral (INE). Within the framework of this comprehensive electoral reform, which also repealed the COFIPE and, in its place, issued the Ley General de Instituciones y Procedimientos Electorales (LGIPE), as well as the Ley General de Partidos Políticos, among other ordinances, the gender quota system was abandoned, and elements of utmost importance were established to guarantee its parity. Among the most outstanding gender-related provisions of this reform we can mention the requirement of parity in candidacies for popularly elected positions, both federal and federal entities, the obligation that the candidacies formulas -proprietary and alternate- were formed by the same gender, the alternation of genders in the proportional representation lists and a more robust set of sanctions for parties that did not fully comply with the new rules (Freidenberg and Alva, 2017, p. 13). It should be noted that various federal entities already contemplated provisions of this nature in their local electoral legislations; however, the LGIPE obliged the whole country to homologate rules, criteria, and sanctions in this matter.

These provisions were complemented and, it should be said, enhanced by the so-called "paridad en todo" reform of 2019. This constitutional reform modified various provisions of the Carta Magna to ratify or include the observation of the principle of parity in all candidacies, as well as in the Lists of Proportional Representation presented by political parties; but, in addition, the observation of the same principle in the appointments of the incumbent persons of the Secretaries of State of the Federal Executive Branch and their equivalents in the federal entities, as well as in the integration of the autonomous bodies; and the establishment of procedures and open competitions for the integration of jurisdictional bodies observing the principle of gender parity (Secretaría de Gobernación, 2019).

The exhaustiveness of these provisions led the reform to be called "paridad en todo", since it ratified not only the obligation to nominate 50% of female candidates and 50% of male

candidates; but also, the obligation to integrate all collegiate bodies in a parity manner, from autonomous bodies to cabinets of the Executive Branches and even bodies of the Judiciary.

COMPETITIVE BLOCKS

After reviewing the historical experience of the successive legal reforms that shaped the rules of the political-electoral game, we can appreciate how the institutional arrangement set the space in which political actors, but also feminist demands, developed their activity. As explained above, the relationship between actors and institutions was not unidirectional, but rather they influenced each other. A clear example of this is that, with the establishment of a quota system - institutional configuration - the behavior of Mexican women was oriented towards the demand to raise their representation threshold and, even more, to establish the principle of parity in candidacies for popularly elected positions.

For their part, political party leaders, under the same institutional arrangement, once again engaged in practices aimed at privileging political representation spaces for men. One of these practices was to relegate women candidates to electoral districts where the political party had, historically, low probabilities of winning the electoral competition. Hence, a new problem to be solved was, precisely, gender equity in electoral competition.

This phenomenon was observed in detail since 2009, when an investigation on the different dimensions of women's participation in the political-electoral arena yielded results in this sense (Aparicio, 2009, pp. 30-37). Using a series of electoral statistics from 1997 to 2006, averages were established to identify which were the stronghold districts, where a party usually won by more than 5%; the close districts, where a party won or lost by less than 5%; or the losing districts, where a party usually lost the election by more than 5%. Considering the three main political parties of that year, the data was very revealing: the Partido Acción Nacional (PAN), the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) and the Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD) concentrated most of their female candidates in districts where they had the lowest probability of winning.

Chart 3. Female candidates by type of electoral district.

Number and percentage of female candidates by type of electoral district (relative majority elections, 2009).		
District type ¹	Number of candidates	Percentage
Partido Acción Nacional		
Loser	78	72.8%
Close	10	9.3%
Stronghold	19	17.7%
Partido Revolucionario Institucional		
Loser	27	49.0%
Close	10	18.1%
Stronghold	18	32.7%
Partido de la Revolución Democrática		
Loser	71	81.6%

¹ Districts were ranked with $\pm 5\%$ margin on average election results from 1997-2006.

Close	7	8.0%
Stronghold	9	10.3%

Source: Author's elaboration, based on Aparicio (2009, p. 34).

Of course, this problem is not exclusive to our country. Specialists in electoral matters have observed how in various latitudes the selection of women candidates is conditioned by gender ideologies that cause, among other results, that they have fewer resources allocated for their campaigns and that they are relegated to competitions that are very difficult for the candidate party to win (Norris and Lovenduski, 1993).

Prior to addressing the criteria that legally emerged to address this problem, it is important to note that electoral competitiveness arises only when there is a "probabilidad esperada de que un partido pierda asientos o posiciones de poder en la próxima elección" (Kayser and Lindstätt, 2015, p. 243). Understood in another way, electoral competitiveness is feasible when there are probabilities of political alternation, because if the ruling party maintains consistently high chances of winning, one can speak of an absence of electoral competitiveness.

At the federal level, this problem was addressed in the new Ley General de Partidos Políticos which, in its article 3, paragraph 5, established a novel criterion, called "no exclusividad". Such provision establishes that each party will determine and make public its criteria to guarantee gender parity in candidacies for federal and local legislators, but that, in no case, "se admitirán criterios que tengan como resultado que alguno de los géneros le sean asignados exclusivamente aquellos distritos en los que el partido haya obtenido los porcentajes de votación más bajos en el proceso electoral anterior" (Secretaría de Gobernación, 2014). In this way, and to balance the competitiveness of women, the electoral legislation prohibited political institutes from reserving for their female candidates the districts where they were less likely to reach victory. Based on this rule, Consejo General of INE issued an interpretation in order to implement the criterion of non-exclusivity in the registration of candidacies.

Through Agreement INE/CG162/2015, it was pointed out that the non-exclusivity criterion sought to guarantee the principle of gender parity, so it entailed ensuring that "dentro del grupo de las candidaturas para distritos en los que se hubieran obtenido los porcentajes de votación más bajos, no exista un sesgo evidente en contra de un género" (INE, 2015, p. 27). Likewise, to clarify which would be considered as the districts with the lowest voting percentages; the Consejo General set forth, for the first time, the methodology that would govern at the federal level.

Said methodology consisted basically of three elements. First, to list all the electoral districts where a party had presented a candidacy in the immediately preceding electoral process, and to order them from lowest to highest according to the percentage of votes obtained. Subsequently, divide that list into thirds corresponding to three blocks, where the first block contained the districts with the lowest percentage of vote, the second block those with average percentage of vote and, finally, the third block with the highest percentage of vote for each political party. Finally, to analyze the block with the lowest percentage of votes, and more precisely, the twenty districts with the least votes for each political party, to identify whether or not in these districts there was a notorious bias against one gender (INE, 2015, pp. 27-28).

The above was only the parameter used by INE for the registration of candidacies in the 2015 federal electoral process. However, as Ordoñez and Flores-Ivich point out, although some state electoral institutes have taken up this parameter, there is a wide variety of methods to comply with the non-exclusivity criterion. Thus, some states "han establecido lineamientos específicos mediante modificaciones a los acuerdos de registro de candidaturas (...) otras han establecido metodologías propias (...) [y otras] han optado también por otorgar a los partidos políticos la facultad de establecer sus propios criterios" (Ordoñez and Flores-Ivich, 2017, p. 141). The variety of criteria has yielded, as would be expected, multiple results. Therefore, it is relevant to address what happened in the case of the State of Mexico.

ELECTORAL PROCESS 2021: THE COMPETITIVE BLOCKS IN THE STATE OF MEXICO

As can be observed, the emergence of a special methodology to guarantee that women have real possibilities to compete electorally is relatively new. Even still in the 2014-2015 local electoral process, the Instituto Electoral del Estado de México (IEEM) did not include an explicit criterion to review this aspect. In Agreement No. IEEM/CG/69/2015, the IEEM authorized the registration of candidacies noting that "las fórmulas presentadas por los institutos políticos y la coalición antes mencionados, se encuentran compuestas por propietarios y suplentes del mismo género, así como la postulación de fórmulas equitativas, por género, garantizándose con ello la paridad de género en la postulación de sus candidaturas correspondientes" (IEEM, 2015, p. 14). That is to say, the only criteria evaluated were quantitative, attending to guarantee compliance with the principle of parity, but not the criterion of non-exclusivity.

Subsequently, the Comisión Especial para la Revisión y Actualización de la Normatividad del IEEM considered it appropriate to repeal the 2016 "Reglamento para el Registro de Candidaturas a los distintos cargos de Elección Popular ante el Instituto Electoral del Estado de México", in order to issue a new regulation that included, among other aspects, the blocks of competitiveness to allow the implementation of the non-exclusivity criterion in the partisan registration of female candidacies.

The new regulation, approved through Agreement No. IEEM/CG/194/2017, in its Article 26, provided that parties would have to divide into three competitive blocks those districts where they wished to register candidacies, "tomando en cuenta al menos los resultados de votación de la elección inmediata anterior de que se trate" (IEEM, 2017, p. 45), in order not to assign a single gender in the districts or municipalities where each party had obtained the lowest percentage of votes.

Additionally, the new regulation described the methodology to classify the competitive blocks and, no less important, established that the IEEM would verify that there was "proporcionalidad" in the allocation of candidacies for each block, taking care that in the one with the lowest competitiveness, no single gender candidacies were assigned. This criterion, however, was not applicable to newly created parties.

Chart 4. Conformation of competitive blocks in electoral districts during the 2018 local electoral process.

Competitiveness Blocks in Electoral Districts of the State of Mexico Local Electoral Process 2018									
Political Party and/or Coalition	Low competitiveness block		Medium competitiveness block		High competitiveness block		Total		Elected women
	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	
PAN ²	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	
PRI	7	8	9	6	7	8	23	22	1
PRD	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	
PT ³	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	
PVEM	8	7	8	7	7	8	23	22	
MC	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	
MORENA	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1
NA	7	8	7	8	9	6	23	22	
Partido Encuentro Social	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	
Vía Radical	-	-	-	-	-	-	25	20	
Coalición “Por el Estado de México al Frente” ⁴	9	7	7	7	6	8	22	22	
Coalición “Juntos Haremos Historia” ⁵	8	6	8	7	6	9	22	22	20
Total							142	132	22

Source: Authors' elaboration, with data from the Agreements IEEM/CG/72/2018, IEEM/CG/73/2018, IEEM/CG/74/2018, IEEM/CG/75/2018, IEEM/CG/76/2018, IEEM/CG/77/2018, IEEM/CG/78/2018, IEEM/CG/79/2018, IEEM/CG/80/2018, IEEM/CG/81/2018, IEEM/CG/82/2018 and IEEM/CG/83/2018, https://www.ieem.org.mx/consejo_general/a2018.html

² During the 2018 Local Electoral Process, the PAN, PRD and MC political parties participated in a Coalition, running candidates in 44 Electoral Districts, and also ran individually for a candidate in District 10 in Valle de Bravo.

³ During the 2018 Local Electoral Process, the PT, Morena and PES parties participated in a Coalition, running candidates in 44 Electoral Districts, and also ran individually for a candidate in District 38 in Coacalco de Berriozábal.

⁴ Coalition formed by the Partido Acción Nacional, Partido de la Revolución Democrática and Movimiento Ciudadano parties.

⁵ Coalition formed by the Morena, Partido del Trabajo and Partido Encuentro Social parties.

Chart 5. Conformation of competitive blocks in municipalities during the 2018 local electoral process.

Competitiveness Blocks in Municipalities of the State of Mexico Local Electoral Process 2018									
Political Party and/or Coalition	Low competitiveness block		Medium competitiveness block		High competitiveness block		Total		Elected women
	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	
PAN	0	2	1	1	2	1	3	4	1
PRI	22	21	21	20	21	20	64	61	8
PRD	1	2	2	0	1	1	4	3	
PT	2	2	4	0	0	3	6	5	1
PVEM	19	20	20	19	20	20	59	59	
MC	4	3	5	3	3	5	12	11	
MORENA	2	2	3	1	1	2	6	5	2
NA	19	19	18	20	20	18	57	57	
Partido Encuentro Social	3	1	1	2	1	2	5	5	
Vía Radical	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
“Por el Estado de México al Frente” Coalition	22	18	19	20	18	21	59	59	9
“Juntos Haremos Historia” Coalition	18	20	21	17	17	21	56	58	18
Total							331	327	39

Source: Authors' elaboration, with data from the Agreements IEEM/CG/94/2018, IEEM/CG/95/2018, IEEM/CG/96/2018, IEEM/CG/97/2018, IEEM/CG/98/2018, IEEM/CG/99/2018, IEEM/CG/100/2018, IEEM/CG/101/2018, IEEM/CG/102/2018, IEEM/CG/103/2018, IEEM/CG/104/2018 and IEEM/CG/105/2018, https://www.ieem.org.mx/consejo_general/a2018.html

Although it was already in force by virtue of the Ley General de Partidos Políticos, this criterion was included in the reform to the Código Electoral del Estado de México of September 2020, which in its article 92 explicitly stated that:

...en ningún caso se admitirán criterios que tengan como resultado que alguno de los géneros le sean asignados exclusivamente aquellos distritos o municipios, en los que el partido haya obtenido los porcentajes de votación más bajos en el proceso electoral anterior... (Secretaría de Asuntos Parlamentarios, 2021).

The fact of being enshrined in the state Código Electoral was, undoubtedly, an advance. However, the text limited the consideration of voting percentages to only one previous electoral process, which, as we will explain later, is not always the most appropriate.

In this context, during the 2021 Local Electoral Process, a new regulation for the registration of candidacies was issued. This regulation incorporated, mainly, the use of technologies to carry out such registration. Regarding the competitive blocks, the current regulation again sets out the methodology for classifying the blocks, in the same terms as the 2017 regulation, but it is more specific in some details not previously contained (IEEM, 2021, pp. 21-25). In this regard, it is

highlighted on the one hand that for coalitions, the sum of the vote obtained by each political party individually will be considered and, on the other hand, that the IEEM would review the conformation of blocks to identify possible "disparidades" in the number of candidacies of one gender compared to the other.

Likewise, the current regulations provide that the Dirección de Partidos Políticos of IEEM must carry out an analysis of the methodology used by each political party, coalition, or common candidacies to verify that there is "proporcionalidad" in each block and that the least competitive block does not exclusively assign candidacies of only one gender. Finally, the regulation reserves to the IEEM Consejo General the power to approve the blocks of competitiveness five days before the beginning of the deadline for the registration of candidacies. The conformation of the respective blocks was as follows.

Chart 6. Conformation of Competitive Blocks in electoral districts during the 2021 local electoral process.

Competitiveness Blocks in Electoral Districts of the State of Mexico Local Electoral Process 2021									
Political Party, Coalition or Common Candidacy	Low competitiveness block		Medium competitiveness block		High competitiveness block		Total		Elected women
	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	
PAN	2	3	3	2	4	3	9	8	
PRI	2	3	4	1	3	4	9	8	1
PRD	3	2	3	2	3	4	9	8	
PT	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	
PVEM	7	8	8	7	8	7	23	22	
MC	7	8	7	8	8	7	22	23	
MORENA	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	
NA	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	
"Va por el Estado de México" ⁶ coalition	5	4	4	5	5	5	14	14	7
"Juntos Haremos Historia" ⁷ coalition	6	5	5	6	6	6	17	17	9
Common Candidacy "Juntos Hacemos Historia" ⁸	1	2	2	1	2	2	5	5	
Total							109	107	17

Source: Author's elaboration, with data obtained from Agreements IEEM/CG/94/2021 and IEEM/CG/111/2021, https://www.icem.org.mx/consejo_general/a2021.html.

⁶ Coalition formed by the Partido Acción Nacional, the Partido Revolucionario Institucional and the Partido de la Revolución Democrática parties.

⁷ Coalition formed by the Partido del Trabajo, Morena and Nueva Alianza Estado de México parties.

⁸ Joint Candidacy of the Partido del Trabajo, Morena and Nueva Alianza Estado de México parties.

Chart 7. Conformation of competitive blocks in municipalities during the 2021 local electoral process.

Competitiveness Blocks in the Municipalities of the State of Mexico Local Electoral Process 2021									
Political Party, Coalition or Common Candidacy	Low competitiveness block		Medium competitiveness block		High competitiveness block		Total		Elected women
	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	
PAN	8	9	9	8	9	9	26	26	1
PRI	9	8	8	9	9	9	26	26	10
PRD	9	8	8	9	8	8	25	25	
PT	0	1	1	0	2	1	3	2	
PVEM	21	20	20	21	22	21	63	62	1
MC	18	19	19	18	19	18	56	55	2
MORENA	0	1	1	0	2	1	3	2	1
NA	1	0	0	1	1	2	2	3	
“Va por el Estado México” Coalition	12	12	11	13	14	11	37	36	20
“Juntos Haremos Historia” Coalition	15	15	15	15	15	15	45	45	11
Common Candidacy “Juntos Hacemos Historia”	4	6	5	5	6	4	15	15	
Total							301	297	46

Source: Author's elaboration, with data obtained from Agreements IEEM/CG/94/2021 and IEEM/CG/113/2021, https://www.ieem.org.mx/consejo_general/a2021.html.

As can be observed, the implementation of the competitive blocks has meant a favorable affirmative action for women. According to the available data, as of this novel institutional arrangement, political parties have registered their candidacies in a more equitable manner in the different blocks. Without detracting from or recognizing this progress, there are still some pending issues that could be solved to reinforce the non-exclusivity criterion and allow a better participation of women in the political-electoral sphere.

CONCLUSIONS

Undoubtedly, the establishment of competitive blocks as a methodology represents a substantial advance to ensure that women candidates are not relegated exclusively to territorial demarcations where their parties have little chance of winning. This institutional mechanism has proven its

influence in modifying the decisions and behaviors of political actors and institutions, since the obligation to nominate women candidates on a parity basis has transcended from a purely quantitative requirement to one of qualitative dimensions. Likewise, this methodology addresses the problem of electoral competitiveness which, as historically observed, represents one of the greatest challenges to women's political participation today.

Although progress has been undeniable, there is the possibility of making some adjustments to the competitiveness blocks to improve their results. The following modifications are contemplated: a) consideration of more remote electoral results; b) parity integration in each competitive block; and c) inclusion of recently created parties in these provisions.

Regarding the consideration of electoral results, it would be convenient not to take as the only referent the immediate previous election, but to extend the weighting of results backwards to have figures that are more in line with historical trends. This measure would have the advantage of avoiding biasing the formation of competitive blocks based on results that could be atypical.

On the other hand, it is important to include clearer provisions in the sense of forming each of the competitiveness blocks in a parity manner, in accordance with the constitutional obligation. So far, the focus has been on the lowest competitive block, to ensure that it is not disproportionately made up of women. However, we must extend the obligation for parties to register candidates on an equal basis in all three blocks, including the most competitive one. This would not only avoid discriminatory measures against women but would also promote their presence in more competitive districts and municipalities.

The institutional conformation in this sense would encourage political institutions to look for attractive profiles to compete in their most profitable districts. This is due to the fact that, on several occasions, political parties have argued that there are no female profiles for the districts where they are most deeply rooted. This is consistent with the qualitative dimension of gender parity which, among other purposes, seeks that women are nominated in districts with equal projection, importance, political influence and real possibilities of winning (TEPJF, 2021).

Finally, regarding newly created parties, it is true that the criterion of the percentage obtained in the immediately preceding election cannot be applicable to them in the formation of competitive blocks. However, the need for them to comply with the non-exclusivity criterion must be assessed based on other reasonable parameters, measurable objectives and aimed at more effectively guaranteeing the principle of gender parity. One possibility is to take as a basis the number of affiliations obtained in each district. For these cases only, the rule could be reversed, i.e., newly created parties would be obliged to present candidates on a parity basis in those districts where they have obtained the highest percentage of signatures for their registration as political parties.

With the establishment of these provisions, the institutional arrangement would seek to encourage better results in other areas related to the promotion of gender parity, especially the more efficient use of party resources destined for female training and the search for profiles that could become female candidates. The main commitment is to guarantee parity understood not only as the insertion of a greater number of women in public life, but also the provision of better possibilities for participation, democratic tools and, above all, substantive equality in the political-electoral sphere.

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