

## ARTICLE

# Women in politics in Brazil: inclusion and political capital of female federal deputies

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## Abstract

This study aims to verify the factors that influence and make the insertion of women in Brazilian politics difficult. The theoretical framework focused on inclusion in politics and political capital, and a descriptive qualitative study was conducted. The data were collected by semi-structured interviews with eight federal deputies in Brazil, elected in 2018, and the thematic analysis was used to examine the data. The results show differences between the inclusion and permanence of women in politics. It was found that quotas are essential so that women do not face difficulties and barriers to affiliation with political parties. Finally, the family capital is the main way that the interviewed women access politics, and it is important as a passport for insertion.

**Keywords:** Women in Politics. Inclusion in Politics. Political Capital.

## *Mulheres na política brasileira: inserção e capital político de deputadas federais*

### Resumo

Este trabalho tem como objetivo verificar os fatores que influenciam e dificultam a inserção das mulheres na política brasileira. Com base no referencial teórico que tratou da inserção na política e do capital político, realizou-se um estudo qualitativo descritivo. A coleta de dados deu-se por meio de entrevistas semiestruturadas, com a análise temática como técnica de análise de dados. As entrevistas foram realizadas com oito deputadas federais no Brasil, eleitas em 2018. Os resultados apontaram diferença entre inserção e permanência das mulheres na política. Verificou-se que as cotas são essenciais, não só para a participação das mulheres, mas para que elas não tenham dificuldades e barreiras na filiação aos partidos. Por fim, observou-se que o capital familiar é uma das principais formas de acesso à política por parte das mulheres entrevistadas, atuando como um passaporte para o seu ingresso na política.

**Palavras-chave:** Mulheres na Política. Inserção na política. Capital Político.

## *Mujeres en la política brasileña: inserción y capital político de las diputadas federales*

### Resumen

Este estudio tiene como objetivo verificar los factores que influyen y obstaculizan la inserción de la mujer en la política brasileña. A partir del referencial teórico sobre la inserción en la política y el capital político, se realizó un estudio cualitativo descriptivo. Los datos se colectaron a través de entrevistas semiestructuradas con ocho diputadas federales en Brasil, elegidas en 2018, y se realizó un análisis temático como técnica de análisis de datos. Los resultados mostraron diferencias entre la inserción y la permanencia de las mujeres en la política. Se ha observado que las cuotas son esenciales para que las mujeres no tengan dificultades en la afiliación a los partidos políticos. Finalmente, se observó que el capital familiar es uno de los medios principales de acceso a la política para las mujeres entrevistadas, que hace las veces de pasaporte para su inserción.

**Palabras clave:** Mujeres en la política. Inserción en la política. Capital político.

## INTRODUCTION

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The entrenched belief that women are primarily confined to caregiving roles within the domestic sphere is a product of the patriarchal underpinnings of Brazilian society. This perception has served to reinforce the notion that women lack the necessary opportunities to actively engage in public life, wield power, and participate meaningfully in the political arena (Freitas, 2020).

Despite expectations that the process of democratization would foster equitable rights and representation for women, as well as other marginalized groups within society, such aspirations have yet to be fully realized (Miguel & Biroli, 2015). Franceschet et al. (2016) further argue that enduring cultural legacies continue to erect formidable structural barriers, thereby impeding the inclusion and advancement of women in political spheres.

For an extensive period, pursuing a political career remained largely outside the realm of possibility for women. Many were, and continue to be, dissuaded from entering this domain, traditionally constructed and maintained by men (Pinto & Silveira, 2018). Consequently, the prevalence of patriarchal norms has resulted in a notable predominance of male presence within Brazilian politics (Fernandes et al., 2020). Within the Americas, Brazil stands out with the lowest representation of women holding political seats (Inter-Parliamentary Union [IPU], 2019; Marques et al., 2021; Sacchet, 2018; Saraiva, 2017).

In the 2018 elections, out of 513 federal deputy positions, merely 77 were occupied by women, constituting a mere 15% of the seats in the Chamber of Deputies (Tribunal Superior Eleitoral [TSE], 2019). It is noteworthy that this level of female participation was deemed, at the time, the highest in Brazil's history.

Given the limited participation of women in Brazilian institutional politics, it is imperative to explore the integration pathways of the few women who hold positions in this domain. A notable gender analysis gap exists within the field of research on political careers in Brazil (Marques, 2021). This study's significance lies in its departure from the prevailing focus on issues related to female underrepresentation or the impact and constraints of affirmative actions on women's political integration, as highlighted by Moritz (2017). Instead, this article aims to accentuate the presence of women in politics, shifting the discourse from their absence. The primary objective of this study is to examine the factors influencing and/or impeding the integration of women into Brazilian politics.

In addition to the present introduction, this article includes a description of the theoretical framework, addressing political integration and political capital. Furthermore, we provide a detailed account of the adopted methodological approach, followed by the presentation of results and data analysis. The concluding remarks serve to finalize the study.

## INSERTION INTO POLITICS AND POLITICAL CAPITAL

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Entry into formal politics occurs through membership in political parties, making party recruitment an indispensable aspect of grooming new politicians. This process encompasses three key stages: membership, training, and assuming positions within or on behalf of the party (Barros, 2021).

Miguel (2003) contends that a political career is not rigidly defined, given the influence of various factors on candidacies and the uncertainties inherent in electoral contests. For example, there exist individuals, termed outsiders, who have never contested an electoral race yet have emerged victorious.

Political capital serves as a crucial lens for understanding participation and integration in politics. Rooted in the concept of symbolic capital elucidated by sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1989, pp. 187-188), political capital denotes "[...] credit established in belief and recognition, or more precisely, in the numerous credit operations by which agents confer on a person – or an object – the very powers they recognize in them".

Miguel (2003, p. 115) further elaborates that political capital is "[...] social recognition that enables certain individuals, more than others, to be acknowledged as political actors and, consequently, capable of engaging in political action". Greater political capital correlates with heightened legitimacy and enhanced ability to navigate the political landscape (Miguel, 2003; Moritz, 2017). Low political capital is often cited as a factor contributing to the underrepresentation of certain candidates and the prevalence of non-competitive candidacies, particularly in the case of female candidates (Marques, 2021).

According to Sáez (2017), political careers and political capital in Brazil have deep-seated traditions, with various factors in the political landscape favoring the accumulation of political capital (Kerbauy & Assumpção, 2011). Additionally, in Brazil, politicians typically ascend through the conversion of their political capital into support (Araújo, 2010).

Miguel (2003) categorizes two forms of political capital operative within the Brazilian context: delegated capital and converted capital. Delegated capital pertains to the visibility acquired through elective mandates and/or previous public positions held by the individual, obtained through institutional channels. On the other hand, converted capital refers to visibility garnered in non-political realms and subsequently transferred to politics; for instance, a soccer player elected as a federal deputy.

Furthermore, in a study spanning from 2002 to 2015, Miguel et al. (2015) identified several forms of political capital prevalent in the Brazilian context among federal deputies: 1. Economic capital: Associated with individuals owning assets or having affiliations with economic groups; 2. Media/converted capital: Derived from pre-existing visibility and recognition, such as actors, journalists, broadcasters, singers, sports celebrities, and similar professions; 3. Leadership within unions, workers' federations, and employers' associations; 4. Affiliation with religious organizations in leadership roles; 5. Delegated capital: Derived from previous public positions held by the individual; 6. Family capital: Benefitting from the prestige and/or connections of politically active family members.

The authors also highlight additional forms of political capital, particularly pertinent in local politics, such as involvement in social movements and civil society organizations, as well as capital derived from professional endeavors that foster networks of contacts, exemplified by professions like doctors and teachers (Miguel et al., 2015).

Scholarly literature underscores the prevalence of family capital, or familism, across much of Brazilian politics (Araújo, 2010; Marques et al., 2021; Miguel et al., 2015; Moritz, 2017; Oliveira et al., 2017; Silva et al., 2023). This form of capital equips individuals with crucial insights into political dynamics, leveraging existing visibility and prestige associated with familial ties. Consequently, the family name becomes a valuable brand, facilitating access to networks of contacts within the political realm, including electoral lieutenants and financial backers (Miguel et al., 2015; Silva et al., 2023). Moritz (2017) emphasizes that, alongside other resources, these contact networks play a pivotal role in political participation.

Furthermore, Miguel et al. (2015, pp. 727-728) observe that "[...] it is relatively frequent for a politician who transitions from municipal to state politics or from the latter to federal politics to mobilize resources to secure a position for a son, spouse, or sibling in the vacated role".

Araújo (2010, p. 579) contends that, within the Brazilian context, politics often operates as a family affair, particularly for women. This suggests that family political capital serves as a resource for both men and women seeking entry into Brazilian politics. However, for women, it not only proves more commonly utilized but also acts as a shortcut or facilitator for political integration (Silva et al., 2023, p. 102). Moritz (2017) further underscores that family capital functions akin to a political inheritance, significantly bolstering women's pathways into the political arena.

Another significant political resource in Brazil, as highlighted by Almeida et al. (2012), is associative capital. Associative capital encompasses various forms of social and organizational involvement, including unions, professional associations, religious groups, student organizations, welfare organizations, women's groups, community associations, and social movements. While family capital remains pivotal for women entering Brazilian politics, there has been a notable increase in female political engagement through association with these movements. Although this capital may not directly translate into institutional political participation, it plays a crucial role in shaping political socialization (Marques et al., 2021).

Furthermore, Unzué (2012) regards a university degree as a form of symbolic political capital in Brazil, given its association with social prestige. The author notes that a significant proportion of Brazilian politicians hold university degrees, citing data from the 2006 parliamentarians (Unzué, 2012). However, despite this observation, the percentage of deputies with higher education elected in the 2018 election remained high, at 80.89% (Câmara dos Deputados, 2019).

According to Miguel (2003, p. 121), "[...] like all forms of capital, political capital is unevenly distributed in society". Studies on the political trajectories of women in Brazil underscore the significant relevance of family capital as one of their primary avenues for entering political careers. While family capital also plays a role for men, it is typically just one of several resources available to them (Araújo, 2010; Miguel et al., 2015).

## METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

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This article presents a qualitative, descriptive research aimed at elucidating the process of women's integration into politics and their political capital.

Data collection employed semi-structured interviews with female federal deputies elected in 2018. The selection of female federal deputies is grounded in Miguel's (2003) assertion that the Chamber of Deputies serves as a crucial entry point to national politics, particularly for individuals active in local politics.

Initial contact with all female federal deputies elected in 2018 was made via email and social networks. While 74 deputies were approached, only 26 responded. Subsequently, after multiple attempts, eight deputies consented to participate in the interviews.

Thus, the research group comprised eight female federal deputies elected in 2018. The interviews, lasting an average of 45 minutes, were conducted remotely via Zoom or Google Meet platforms, accommodating the preferences of the parliamentarians and addressing logistical challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The interview process unfolded in two stages: first, the development of the interview script, informed by existing literature, and then the validation of the script. The validation interview allowed for refinement of the instrument, ensuring alignment with the research objectives through necessary adjustments and improvements.

Data analysis utilized thematic analysis, a qualitative method proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), aimed at identifying, analyzing, and describing patterns and themes within the research data through meticulous organization and reporting.

Thematic analysis involves scrutinizing the dataset – comprising interviews, focus groups, or textual materials – to discern recurring patterns of meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 15).

The application of thematic analysis, as delineated by Braun and Clarke (2006), entails six phases. Initially, the data familiarization phase (phase 01) involved multiple readings of transcribed interviews with the deputies. Subsequently, initial coding (phase 02) was conducted to capture the salient features of the data. Following this, themes were reviewed (phase 03) and validated against coded extracts (phase 04), culminating in the refinement and definition of themes (phase 05) and the production of a comprehensive data analysis report (phase 06).

Themes were discerned through the initial coding process, wherein interview transcripts were segmented into extracts and categorized into codes. These codes were then amalgamated into overarching themes. In this research, six themes emerged from the collected data. However, this article focuses solely on one segment of a doctoral thesis, discussing the theme of insertion into politics. It is imperative to note that the findings presented here represent only a fraction of the overall thesis, specifically addressing one of the themes identified in the thematic analysis: insertion into politics, comprising subthemes such as (1) insertion into politics, (2) support from political parties, and (3) preparation for politics.

The research received approval from the Ethics Committee of Plataforma Brasil on September 14, 2021, under CAAE No. 51072421.4.0000.5137.

## RESULTS AND DATA ANALYSIS

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To uphold confidentiality concerning the identities of the interviewees, this study opted to assign pseudonyms inspired by pioneering women across various fields in Brazil: 1. Esther de Figueiredo, the first woman to head a university in Brazil; 2. Almerinda Gama, a lawyer and union leader, the first woman to vote as a delegate in the election for the Constituent Assembly of 1933; 3. Maria Lenk, a swimmer, the first Brazilian woman to represent Brazil at the Olympics; 4. Rita Lobato, the first Brazilian woman to graduate in medicine in Brazil, in 1887;

Alzira Soriano, the first female mayor in Latin America; 5. Eugênia Moreyra, a journalist, the first female reporter in Brazil; 6. Ellen Gracie, the first woman to join the Supreme Court of Brazil; 7. Myrthes de Campos, recognized as the first female lawyer in Brazil.

Box 1 provides an overview of the interviewed deputies' key characteristics.

**Box 1**  
**Characteristics of the interviewed deputies**

Deputies	Age	Children	Marital Status
Esther	51	02 children: 19 and 15 years old	married
Almerinda	63	03 children: 40, 34 and 25 years old	married
Maria	43	02 children: 21 and 12 years old	married
Rita	57	02 children: 30 and 27 years old	married
Alzira	69	03 children: 41, X, X.	married
Eugênia	54	02 children: 13 and 21 years old	married
Ellen	40	01 children: 02 years old	married
Myrthes	58	02 children: 27 and 28 years old	married

Source: Research Data.

The interviewees in this study are predominantly identified as white, reflecting the demographic composition of female deputies elected in the 2018 elections, where 81.8% were white. This statistic underscores the stark underrepresentation of mixed-race, black, and Indigenous women in Brazilian politics (Marques et al., 2021).

In terms of age, six out of the eight deputies are aged over 50, exceeding the average age range observed in 2018, which fell between 38 and 47 years. Furthermore, all of the deputies are married and have children, mirroring the marital and parental status of the majority of elected officials in 2018 (Marques et al., 2021; Silva et al., 2023). While one deputy has a daughter, the remaining deputies are mothers to two or more children. Notably, the children are predominantly adults, with only three teenagers and one infant, indicating that only one deputy is actively raising a young child, a dynamic discussed by Santos (2012) in their research on executives.

In terms of academic background, all deputies hold higher education degrees across diverse fields, including psychology, administration, pedagogy, journalism, mathematics, and law. Among the eight deputies, two possess doctorates, and one holds a master's degree. This observation aligns with findings from Unzué's (2012) research, which underscores the significance of a university diploma as a form of political symbolic capital in Brazil. Professionally, the deputies boast a range of backgrounds: two were educators, one worked in banking, another served as a state public servant, two were journalists, one pursued a career in law alongside entrepreneurship, and another exclusively practiced law.

Regarding their roles in formal politics with elective positions, three deputies entered the political arena as newcomers in 2018. According to Miguel (2003), these individuals are categorized as outsiders, having never contested an electoral race before but securing victory for higher hierarchical level positions.

The characterization of outsiders is particularly relevant given that the 2018 elections witnessed a significant turnover in candidates, with the majority of deputies elected to the Chamber of Deputies being newcomers, constituting 28.6% of first-time politicians (Marques et al., 2021).

However, research underscores that one of the most influential factors contributing to electoral success is tied to the political capital accumulated from prior electoral experience (Chaves & Mancuso, 2020). Araújo et al. (2022) emphasize that while candidacy success hinges on various factors, candidates with previous elective positions or seeking reelection typically enjoy better prospects.

This dynamic extends to the remaining five deputies, who commenced their political careers earlier, holding positions such as city councilor, state deputy, and federal deputy. These findings bolster Miguel's (2003) assertion that political careers in Brazil often commence with city council positions. Among these five, two are serving their third term as federal deputies, one is in her second term, and the others are in their first term.

The deputies were classified along the ideological spectrum based on the framework proposed by Bolognesi et al. (2022). To safeguard their anonymity, the ideological spectrum is not correlated with their names in this study. Box 2 provides a comprehensive overview of these data.

**Box 2**  
**Ideological Spectrum of the Deputies**

Party	Number of Interviewed Deputies	Ideology
Novo	1	Right
PP (Progressistas)	1	Right
PMDB	1	Right
PT	2	Left
Avante	1	Center-Right
PSL	1	Right
PSB	1	Center-Left

Source: Research data adapted from Bolognesi et al. (2022) and Câmara dos Deputados (2023).

These findings are consistent with the findings of Marques et al. (2021), whose study revealed a notable level of party fragmentation in Brazil, with only two of the interviewed deputies belonging to the same party. The research also underscored that the parties electing the highest number of female deputies were PT and PSL. Out of the parties securing seats in 2018, 22 had elected women, with 11 of them identified as right-wing parties (Silva et al., 2023).

According to the data presented in Box 2, of the eight interviewees, two are affiliated with left-leaning ideologies, as classified by Bolognesi et al. (2022); four deputies are categorized as right-wing; one as center-left, and one as center-right. These deputies reflect the broader profile of deputies elected in 2018, with a majority identified as right-wing (44.2%), according to Marques et al. (2021), in contrast to left (33.8%) and center (22.1%) alignments.

Thus, it is evident that the deputies interviewed in this study adhere to the prevailing profile of deputies elected in 2018, as highlighted by Silva et al. (2023): predominantly right-leaning, white, educated, married women with children, and prior political experience.

As outlined in the methodology, the results are centered around the theme of “insertion into politics” and are structured and presented below within sub-themes: (1) insertion into politics, (2) support from political parties, and (3) preparation for politics.

## Insertion into Politics

Esther’s journey into politics began with her involvement in demonstrations, eventually transitioning into the role of organizing her party’s political meetings. It was in this capacity that she took on the responsibility of encouraging women to consider candidacy, spurred on by the insistence of those she reached out to. Reflecting on this, Esther recounts, “[...] and then those who came said, ‘Oh no, we came, you’re going too, you’re going to be a candidate as well.’ So I said, ‘Okay, fine,’ and then I became a candidate” (Esther).

Almerinda’s entry into the realm of politics was rooted in her deep-seated concern for social inequality. Her journey commenced during her university years, where she actively engaged in student movements. Recalling her early involvement, Almerinda reflects, “[...] and then I never left, right, that’s been, I don’t know, forty-something years, since 1976” (Almerinda).

Maria’s path towards political engagement unfolded over the span of two decades, initially as a journalist covering political themes. Her audience’s expectations eventually propelled her towards active participation, despite her initial reluctance. Maria explains, “[...] and then in 2018, I was pushed into running. I resisted a lot” (Maria).

As a lifelong educator, Rita found herself drawn into party politics through the encouragement of her colleagues, leading her to attend her party’s meetings in her local community. This early involvement laid the foundation for her active participation in politics. Reflecting on her journey, Rita recalls, “Then there was a meeting in the city where I lived to discuss the [Party].

They invited me, since I was interested, I went. Then I thought: well, if that's the case, I'll join too, and started to actively participate in politics" (Rita).

Alzira's entry into the political arena was initially shaped by her marriage to a politician. Serving as her husband's partner in politics, she gradually gained experience within the political landscape, eventually making her foray into formal politics. Reflecting on her journey, Alzira shares, "In the political process, I've been participating as a partner since 1979 and as a candidate since [...], I ran for city councilor in 1988" (Alzira).

Similar to Maria, Eugênia, also a journalist, found herself compelled to pursue a political career unexpectedly: "I was tired of my work as a journalist, not tired, I had reached the top of what I could expect, [...]. And then the invitations came" (Eugênia).

Ellen's political aspirations were deeply influenced by her mother's legacy, who served as a city councilor for four consecutive terms. Reflecting on her journey, Ellen shares, "[...] And she was actually the first person who saw this possibility of a political vein in me, inviting me to run for city councilor in her place in the next elections [...]" (Ellen). It's noteworthy that Ellen's involvement in politics led her to meet her husband, who was also active in politics.

Myrthes, another parliamentarian with ties to a politician, acknowledges that her entry into politics was largely shaped by her marriage: "And politics entered my life due to my marriage. [...] I married a politician and, in a way, became a politician myself" (Myrthes).

An analysis of the deputies' insertion into politics, considering their political capital as classified by Miguel (2003) and Miguel et al. (2015), yields the results outlined in Box 3:

**Box 3**  
**Political Capitals of the Interviewed Deputies**

Deputy	Type of Capital	Justification	Quotations
Esther	Capital derived from participation in social movements.	Began her political journey following political demonstrations and the organization of party meetings.	"Well, to sum it up, I became an organizer of political meetings because I was, due to the fact that I provided the space, so I provided, I organized, I called and everything" (Esther).
Almerinda	Capital derived from leadership in unions and workers' federations.	Entered politics through the student movement, but later actively participated in the union movement, becoming its president.	"I started my political life in 1976, [...], when I joined the psychology course and there I got involved in the student movement" (Almerinda).
Maria and Eugênia	Media capital/ Converted capital.	Journalists who enjoyed recognition achieved in their profession.	"It even increased my responsibility more, because I believe that many people voted for me, not really believing that I would be an excellent deputy, but voted because they liked me: 'Oh, I like her work as a journalist, I don't know what she's going to do, but let's bet.' They bet!" (Eugênia).
Rita	Delegated capital.	Held positions as municipal secretary of education, secretary, and deputy secretary of state for education.	"To be a city councilor, I was finishing a term as municipal secretary of education; and, in a way, everyone: 'Run, run', I ended up running" (Rita)
Alzira, Ellen, and Myrthes	Family capital.	Have family members who have been involved in politics.	"[...], because I believe they gave me their vote of confidence backed by my mother's work" (Ellen).

Source: Research data.

The findings corroborate the conclusions drawn by Araújo (2010), Grossi and Miguel (2000), Miguel (2003), and Silva et al. (2023) regarding the pivotal role of family capital in facilitating women's entry into politics. Among the eight deputies examined, three possess this form of capital, underscoring Miguel et al.'s (2015) observation of its significant presence among women in the Chamber of Deputies. It's essential to note that the deputies discussed in this study are all white. Therefore, these findings, including the prevalence of family capital, are specific to this demographic and cannot be extrapolated beyond this context.

Furthermore, the analysis reveals that the spouses of three deputies constitute their primary source of family capital. This observation is consistent with Ellen's case, who initially succeeded her mother and later married a politician who supported her political campaigns as a deputy. This underscores the influence of male capital, indicating men's continued prominence in politics, even in facilitating the electoral success of women (Silva et al., 2023).

Examining the ideological spectrum based on Bolognesi et al.'s (2022) classification, it becomes evident that the three deputies with family ties lean more towards the right. This finding aligns with the research by Resende and Epitácio (2017) and Silva et al. (2023), which suggests that left-wing deputies generally have less reliance on family capital in their political trajectories. Additionally, the three deputies with family capital already possess political experience, affirming its prevalence among seasoned candidates (Miguel et al., 2021).

Furthermore, media/converted capital emerges as another significant pathway for women's involvement in politics, exemplified by the two deputies who leveraged their visibility as journalists to gain political capital. This finding is in line with Miguel's (2003) discussion, underscoring the effectiveness of various forms of capital in the Brazilian political landscape, particularly in light of the vulnerability of party institutions.

Regarding family capital, Miguel et al. (2015) observe that it's commonplace in Brazil for politicians seeking to advance their careers to facilitate the political entry of their children, spouses, or relatives into vacated positions. This phenomenon is evident in Ellen's case, where she was nominated by her mother to replace her in a political race. Ellen's experience underscores the significant influence exerted by familial connections on her political trajectory.

Similarly, Alzira actively participated in her husband's political campaigns before formally entering politics herself. Despite her familiarity with the political arena, Alzira highlights the challenges she faced, encountering skepticism about her capacity to engage in politics due to her status as a politician's wife:

Making them understand that, even though I am [husband]'s wife, I could still make a contribution as his wife. This is very difficult, even today, this perception within the party, that I also have the right to participate. I suffer [...], and this is indeed one of the difficulties (Alzira).

When Alzira informed her husband about her decision to enter formal politics, his reaction was one of surprise:

He looked at me very seriously and said, 'Are you sure about this? Do you understand the step you're taking?' Then, I said, 'I know, rest assured that I won't cause you any embarrassment, I'll help you by also running my campaign' (Alzira).

Even though Alzira had actively participated in her husband's political campaigns, providing advice and immersing herself in the political environment, her decision to formally enter politics herself was met with skepticism by her husband. Araújo's (2010) research also highlights the resistance from husbands who are hesitant about their wives entering politics.

Alzira's account reveals her husband's apprehension regarding her continued role in advising him during electoral campaigns and the potential impact her political involvement might have on his image. This apprehension underscores Alzira's perception of the challenges she faced in being recognized by others, including her own husband, as capable of pursuing a political career independently.

Similarly, Eugênia also recounted her husband's reaction to her decision to engage in politics:

My husband was adamantly against my candidacy. He is an engineer and expressed concern: Oh my, this will ruin your life, ruin your career, you're going to tarnish your name, nobody likes politicians, you're going to drag your name through the mud (Eugênia).

Ellen frequently consulted her husband regarding her candidacies, drawing on his previous experience in politics:

[...] in fact, I asked my husband if I could run for federal deputy. At the time, he didn't think it was a good idea because the chance of me getting elected as a federal deputy was minimal. He even suggested that I could run for state deputy, but I said I didn't want to [...] (Ellen).



While the deputies encountered no barriers to their candidacies and remained resolute in their aspirations, the persistence of patriarchy within marital relationships is evident, as discussed by Saffioti (2004). The author contends that patriarchy is constantly evolving and adapting to new social configurations, with varying degrees of male dominance. Husbands' reactions upon learning of their wives' interest in formal politics, either through outright opposition or attempts to influence what they perceive as "a good idea," reflect this situation of questioning and denial. Thus, the deputies' statements align with studies by Grossi and Miguel (2000), which assert that women face obstacles within the family environment, including from their husbands, regarding their participation in politics.

Regarding the challenges in joining political parties, deputies Esther, Maria, Eugênia, Ellen, and Myrthes reported none:

Nothing, absolutely nothing. [...]. No, I didn't suffer at all (Esther).

I didn't feel any specific difficulty because for at least a year, parties had been inviting me to get into politics because I'm a journalist, right, I already had a career, followers, fans, the whole thing. So, I was an asset for any party at that time. Thus, the parties were competing for me, right? (Maria).

When joining the party, I didn't have much difficulty, as I said, I received invitations. I was invited by nine and chose one (Eugênia).

No, because nowadays they need women, right, the 30% (Ellen).

As Araújo (2010) highlights, in Brazil, women rarely encounter obstacles to their candidacy due to the significant number of female candidates. It's notable that the deputies faced no difficulties in joining political parties, as these parties are mandated by Law No. 9.504 (1997) to fulfill the legal requirement stipulating that at least 30% of electoral candidacies must be filled by women. Membership serves as the initial step toward candidacy, and entry into political parties did not pose a barrier for the deputies; in fact, some were even invited to join.

Hence, as discussed by Rezende (2017), it's evident that the quota law is crucial and indispensable for the inclusion of women in politics. This research underscores the significance of the quota law in preventing women from encountering obstacles when joining parties. However, it's essential to emphasize that this doesn't imply that these deputies don't face challenges in their campaigns and political endeavors.

## Support from political parties

Araújo (2010) underscores the significance of political parties as the central entities for organizing political representation within democracies. Additionally, the author suggests that in Brazil, politicians typically gain entry into the political arena through the political capital they possess and convert into support.

While the deputies faced no obstacles in joining their respective parties, the dynamics shifted during the political campaign phase, where support dwindled to minimal or nonexistent levels:

The party, we don't get money from the party. But, the party, I remember they provided an accountant and a lawyer for us to consult, to know what we can and cannot do (Esther).

The party didn't help me at all, absolutely nothing, I ran my campaign on my own, the way I wanted. But, like, nothing is nothing [...]. So, in general, the parties use women just to meet the quota, period, right? (Maria).

Every difficulty. [...]. And there I was, his wife competing against chiefs with ten terms in the City Council (Alzira).

And I had great difficulties with support, money too, because campaigns are funded by the party fund, and as I was just a bet, right, for the party, I had this difficulty (Eugênia).

The prevailing perception is that political parties prioritize adherence to gender quota regulations (Costa & Gonçalves, 2021) while neglecting to provide essential support to women during electoral campaigns. It has become clear that rather than merely overlooking this support, political parties actively avoid providing it, perhaps as a deliberate strategy to marginalize women from political participation.

In essence, political parties seem content with fulfilling the bare minimum mandated by legislation regarding women's candidacies, merely meeting the required quota numbers while allocating minimal or no resources, as illustrated by Eugênia's experience. This suggests a systemic avoidance of support for women, possibly serving as a deliberate tactic to perpetuate male dominance within the political sphere.

This observation resonates with the findings of Bueno and Junckes (2020) and Chaves and Mancuso (2020), who suggest that the availability of financial resources significantly impacts the electoral success of candidates, with men typically benefiting from greater access to funding.

This situation was made explicitly clear through an anecdote shared by Deputy Maria, highlighting how her party hesitated to allocate resources for her mayoral campaign in a capital city in 2020:

And now, as for my campaign for mayor, they were there not wanting to help at all, right. [...]. But they wanted to distribute resources among the men, among their friends (Maria).

The lack of support extends beyond financial resources and encompasses leadership and fellow politicians, as Eugênia pointed out. Such support not only holds significance but also lends credibility and secures votes for candidates during elections, playing a pivotal role in electoral success. Moritz (2017) underscores the importance of a robust network of contacts in electoral contests.

In this study, the glaring absence of resources and support emerged as barriers preventing these women from making headway in political spheres. These findings resonate with Krook and Norris (2014), who highlight the resource disparities faced by women in political engagement, and with the research conducted by Chaves and Mancuso (2020), which underscores the disadvantages experienced by women in the 2018 elections.

Matos (2010) notes that women are less likely to receive party support during political campaigns, a sentiment echoed by Eduardo's (2018) research, which illustrates the skewed distribution of resources in favor of men. Consequently, women are disadvantaged by the unequal availability of financial resources for campaigns, rendering them unable to compete on equal footing with their male counterparts (Carvalho & Yasuda, 2017).

Ellen's experience sheds light on the challenges faced within political parties. Despite affiliating with two different parties throughout her political journey and being offered a campaign infrastructure after her election as a city councilor, the promised support failed to materialize:

When they invited me to be a candidate, they promised a comprehensive campaign structure, but unfortunately, it never materialized. This unfortunate reality includes both financial assistance and practical support (Ellen).

In her second party, her husband facilitated her affiliation. However, in her current party, her journey took a different turn:

Everything my party promised me, they delivered. [...]. In this case, everything arrived, and we managed to make our election victorious, and we then began our work as a federal deputy (Ellen).

The two contrasting experiences of Ellen prompt a crucial question: Did the resources she received in the second party come about because her membership and candidacy were negotiated by her husband? Or, perhaps, because he is a man?

Political parties, as highlighted by Toledo and Jardim (2019) and echoed in the testimonies of the deputies in this study, are predominantly controlled by men, with power concentrated in the hands of party leaders. Matos (2010) further asserts that these spaces are often characterized by male dominance, fostering obstacles for women through patriarchal structures.

From this perspective, it can be inferred that a man's involvement in party negotiations might indeed enhance the likelihood of success, as indicated by Ellen's experience. This suggests that patriarchy exerts a significant influence on the political landscape, erecting hurdles and barriers for women while favoring men or women associated with male figures in politics, as well as those who possess family capital.

Deputies Almerinda, Rita, and Myrthes also received support in their respective electoral campaigns:

After you consolidate, as I am in my fifth term, it's a bit different, right. [...]. But it was very important, it was very important, because everything is very unequal (Almerinda).

[Party] is a party that creates space for you, [...], but I hear a lot about the difficulties, and I think I also have difficulties, my party too (Rita).

We had financial support, right, from the party fund [...] (Myrthes).

Almerinda benefited from her party's support in her latest electoral campaign, leveraging her third term as a federal deputy and fifth term in formal politics, thanks to her status as an incumbent. However, she highlights disparities in the support extended to other women by the party. Rita affirms that not only did the party support her, but it also encouraged the participation of more women in politics. Despite this, she acknowledges the challenges faced by women in the political arena. Similarly, Myrthes encountered no significant obstacles in her political campaigns, receiving financial backing from the party.

It's worth noting that Myrthes' husband is also a politician, which may have facilitated her access to support for political campaigns from the party. As discussed by Miguel et al. (2015), family capital can equip candidates with essential knowledge about the political landscape, visibility inherited from relatives, a network of contacts within electoral staff, and financial backing, among other advantages.

Furthermore, the figure of the man or husband, through family capital, emerges again as a facilitator for women's political advancement. This research underscores that family capital serves as a kind of "passport" for women's entry into this realm, aiding them in garnering support and financial assistance, thereby enhancing their prospects for electoral success. In this context, a woman not only gains insights into the political arena through family capital but also acquires a means of entry.

Myrthes acknowledges her privileged position and recognizes that her situation does not reflect the reality of most Brazilian deputies:

I talk with several of my deputy friends who have a lot of difficulty with everything. [...], I am a privileged woman because the doors have always been open for me, but I know that what we live today is not for everyone, is it, maybe I am an exception (Myrthes).

The deputies' testimonies underscore the pervasive gender inequalities in party support for candidacies, encompassing financial and material resources, as discussed by Matos (2010) and Eduardo (2018).

The research findings indicate that women with familial political capital and incumbency status encounter fewer obstacles in securing party support during electoral campaigns. Family capital, recognized as a primary avenue for women's entry into politics, as supported by existing literature (Moritz, 2017; Silva et al., 2023), also serves as a resource that facilitates their longevity in the political sphere. It helps mitigate barriers related to political acumen, as well as bolsters support and financial assistance during campaigns.

However, it's crucial to acknowledge that family capital doesn't entirely erase the challenges faced by women in politics. While it can alleviate some hurdles, it remains a partial facilitator. Furthermore, this study reveals that family capital disproportionately benefits white women. Yet, it is important to avoid generalizations, as these results may not apply to non-white deputies, given their absence from the interviews.

Deputy Alzira's account highlights ongoing challenges in her party affiliation. She recounts a recent incident where there was an attempt to thwart her reelection candidacy:

Just to give you an idea, today, despite all the contributions I have already made to the party, at the beginning of this year, I found out that the state directory had already eliminated me as a candidate for reelection. This had already been communicated to municipal directories that I would not be a candidate. But yes, my struggle is ongoing (Alzira).

Deputy Alzira's remarks align with Nakano's (2018, p. 6) assertion that "the world of politics excludes women". Despite Alzira's extensive political experience, potential for reelection, and the imperative to fulfill the 30% electoral quota, her candidacy was disregarded by the party for the upcoming election.

This highlights the significant influence of political parties in either facilitating or impeding women's participation in politics and their likelihood of securing election. Political parties bear the responsibility of candidate recruitment for elections and the allocation of resources and support for political campaigns (Barbieri et al., 2021; Franco, 2021). Thus, parties wield considerable influence in shaping political representation (Araújo, 2010).

## Preparation for politics

Esther elaborates on the preparation for entering politics, indicating that her party employs a selection process for potential candidates and provides training and classes for individuals interested in pursuing political roles:

In fact, the selection process, we had a bunch of online classes, we take tests, draft bills. It's really cool! I learned a ton, I studied a ton! (Esther).

In contrast, deputies Maria, Rita, and Eugênia assert that political parties fail to adequately prepare women for political roles. Maria and Eugênia, both journalists, brought some familiarity with the political landscape to their candidacies and sought out additional knowledge independently. Myrthes, married to a politician, had prior experience in the field through her husband's involvement:

Because the parties do not prepare women, right? [...]. First, I was a political journalist, so I breathed politics for 20 years, I just didn't have a mandate. [...] Second, I studied. When I decided to get into this thing, I started studying everything, I devoured the Constitution from start to finish. [...] I knew the Rules of Procedure inside out, so I went after it, right (Maria).

When I was elected, I took the Renova.br course for first-term deputies, that was very important. [...]. But I didn't have any other. My preparation was my work as a journalist (Eugênia).

And after I married my husband, that's when I saw what really differentiated public policy was and then we somehow got involved, but already with that vision of what it was, right? (Myrthes).

The congresswomen who entered politics through media capital demonstrate a deep understanding of the political landscape, honed through their experiences as journalists.

Similarly, congresswomen who leveraged family capital gained practical insights into politics through direct exposure to family members involved in the political sphere, as illustrated by the journeys of Myrthes and Alzira. This research underscores how family and media capital serve as enablers, equipping congresswomen with essential political knowledge.

Yet, despite the advantages conferred by these forms of capital, congresswomen like Alzira and Ellen highlight the absence of tailored preparation for political engagement at the outset of their careers. Ellen recalls a time when available initiatives were limited to party-sponsored lectures primarily focused on communication and legal matters. However, the contemporary landscape has evolved, with political parties now actively investing in the training and development of their members:

No, at that time the party didn't have that mentality, right, of preparing, not only women, but I think, including, male candidates, this is a recent thing and something I consider very important (Alzira).

Today, the reality of the party four years later is completely different, [...]. And today we have, I think, more than 12 free and online courses available for them to take anytime. [...] (Ellen).

Myrthes emphasizes that she lacked dedicated preparation time, with her learning evolving organically over the course of her term. Rita similarly emphasizes that her preparation stemmed primarily from her life experiences:

I didn't have time [...]. So, you know, I, as our people say, I went in blindly, you understand? My first term, and the second too (Myrthes).

Well, I think life, you know, life experiences. [...] I ended up running and there wasn't that preparation, you know, it was learning by doing (Rita).

The congresswomen's statements collectively suggest that the majority did not undergo specific training or preparation tailored for entering politics. Krook and Norris (2014) argue that customized career plans and training for women are crucial for achieving gender equity in politics. Additionally, Marques (2021) underscores the significance of understanding legislation and political strategies as pivotal assets for electoral success. However, the data indicates a shift in party approaches, with many now offering training opportunities.

Preparation and qualifications are paramount for women to broaden their participation in politics. In essence, it's imperative for women to acquire additional skills and expertise to access the same spheres as men (Kanan, 2010).

Box 4 provides a succinct overview of the primary findings of this research.

**Box 4**  
**Summary of Key Findings**

	Corroborates Literature	Contribution to Literature
Political Involvement	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Family capital serves as the predominant pathway for women's initiation into politics.</li> <li>2. Certain politicians leverage their familial connections to position their children, spouses, or relatives in politics, often without their genuine desire to enter the political arena.</li> <li>3. The 30% quota plays a crucial role in facilitating women's participation in politics.</li> <li>4. Husbands often exhibit resistance and express concerns regarding the candidacy of congresswomen.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Media capital/convertible assets also surfaced as a significant avenue for women's political engagement.</li> <li>2. The implementation of the 30% quota law for women's candidacies is crucial to mitigate obstacles in their integration and affiliation with political parties.</li> <li>3. Political parties wield considerable influence over the extent of women's involvement in politics and their actual prospects of being elected.</li> </ol>
Party Support	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Women encounter resource constraints and encounter challenges in electoral campaigns.</li> <li>2. Political parties prioritize adherence to gender quota legislation, allocating resources to female candidates primarily due to legal obligations.</li> <li>3. Insufficient party support during political campaigns, particularly in terms of financial aid.</li> <li>4. Gender disparities within political parties.</li> <li>5. Male predominance within political party structures.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Political parties neglect and deliberately avoid providing support as a tactic to sideline women from politics.</li> <li>2. The presence of male politicians, particularly husbands, is pivotal for women to access resources and support in electoral campaigns.</li> <li>3. Family capital functions as a "passport," facilitating women in acquiring support and financial resources from political parties.</li> </ol>
Preparation for Politics	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Most political parties failed to adequately prepare women for political engagement.</li> <li>2. Women require enhanced preparation and qualifications to assume positions of authority and influence.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Family and media capital serve as instrumental factors enabling congresswomen to acquire political acumen.</li> </ol>

Source: Research Data.

## CONCLUSIONS

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This article aimed to explore the factors influencing and hindering women's participation in Brazilian politics, using semi-structured interviews with eight federal deputies elected in 2018.

The qualitative data from our study align with the typical profile of federal deputies elected in 2018, characterized by women mostly positioned on the right, white, educated, married, with children, prior political experience, and possessing family capital.

We found that family capital, associated with this profile, serves as a primary means of access for the interviewed women. However, it's essential to note that our data is limited to white women, so these results cannot be generalized. Nonetheless, family capital emerges as a critical resource facilitating women's entry into politics, consistent with existing literature.

Additionally, our study reveals alternative pathways for women's political engagement. Media capital, particularly for deputies with journalism backgrounds, emerges as another significant factor facilitating their entry into politics.

The deputies mentioned that they did not face difficulties in joining or affiliating with political parties. One explanation for this could be the requirement for parties to meet the minimum quota of 30% female candidacies. While existing literature highlights the importance of quotas for women's political participation, our research underscores that they are crucial not only for ensuring women's presence but also for preventing obstacles in party affiliation.

However, a disparity between the ease of entry and the challenges of sustaining a political career for women becomes evident. Difficulties arise during campaigns, including limited support or financial resources from the party, gender disparities in party support, attempts to obstruct candidacies, and resistance from husbands towards their wives' political involvement.

This dichotomy suggests that while barriers may be less pronounced during party affiliation, they become more apparent during electoral campaigns. Thus, a key finding of our study pertains to the selection, preparation, and support mechanisms for candidates, shedding light on the internal workings of political parties.

The research uncovered that family capital plays a pivotal role in assisting women to garner support during electoral campaigns, as evidenced by the three deputies who received backing through this capital. The involvement of a male figure, typically a husband, as a negotiator with political parties further facilitates the acquisition of necessary campaign support. Moreover, it was underscored that incumbency enhances the likelihood of securing resources.

Family capital emerges as a critical asset for women's entry into politics, offering practical insights into the political landscape through direct engagement. Consequently, this capital functions as a "passport" for accessing support and financial resources from parties. Women endowed with family capital typically encounter fewer hurdles when venturing into politics, especially concerning support and resource acquisition for their campaigns.

Furthermore, the study unveiled that political parties often overlook or deliberately refrain from extending support as a tactic to sideline women from politics and uphold male dominance. Given that parties oversee the distribution of resources and support in electoral campaigns, their actions, such as candidate recruitment, significantly impact women's participation. It is evident that electoral success is closely tied to resource allocation. Therefore, if parties allocate only the bare minimum resources to women, they undermine their significance in the political arena.

This investigation also sheds light on the preparation required for entering politics. While it is observed that political parties are currently offering courses and training for their candidates, this was not the reality encountered by five of the interviewed deputies during their campaigns. Some, as mentioned, adopted a "learn-by-doing" approach, while others had prior exposure to the political landscape and gained insights into its workings. This was particularly true for deputies who had access to family or convertible capital.

It is crucial to clarify that the women under study are serving as parliamentarians, actively engaging in Brazilian politics. Therefore, the analysis pertains to a small yet significant group of women who have attained institutional positions historically dominated by men. Moreover, it's essential to underscore that the study's findings are derived from a specific demographic: predominantly right-leaning, white, educated, married women with children.

One limitation of this study is the small number of deputies who agreed to participate, which restricted the characteristics of the sample. As a result, the study lacks diversity, particularly in terms of racial representation, as non-white women were not included in the sample. Consequently, the results related to family influence cannot be generalized to all deputies elected in 2018, as they only reflect the perspectives of white women.

For future research, it is recommended to focus on developing strategies to enhance women's inclusion in the political arena. These efforts should involve providing comprehensive support to enable women to actively engage in politics, ultimately leading to increased representation of women in this domain.

Additionally, it is proposed to conduct studies that delve into the racial profile of women in politics. Furthermore, exploring the experiences and challenges faced by women in this field can contribute to a better understanding of the dynamics of gender and power in politics.

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**Carolina Maria Mota-Santos:** Conceptualization (Supporting); Project administration (Lead); Validation (Supporting); Methodology (Supporting); Writing- original draft (Supporting); Writing- review & editing (Supporting).

#### DATA AVAILABILITY

All anonymized data supporting the results of this study have been made available in the Digital Library of PUC Minas and can be accessed at <https://web.sistemas.pucminas.br/BDP/PUC%20Minas/Home/Visualizar?seq=25EA30D909D34E9881B5307AA6E9AFC6>

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