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Female presence and influence: New selection and decision-making strategies in Spanish parliaments

Beatriz Carrasco Ariza
Universidad Pablo de Olavide
0000-0001-9401-7222; bcarari@upo.es

Andrés Benítez Espinosa
Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia
0000-0002-2213-868X; andresbenitez@poli.uned.es



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Abstract

As women's involvement in political activity has evolved throughout history, the demand to participate in political decision-making has increased. With a special emphasis on gender differences, this article aims to ascertain the consequences that new strategies for candidate selection in Spanish parliaments have had for group decision-making. Using data from two surveys of political elites between 2011 and 2018, the perceptions of national and regional representatives are compared at two different moments in time. This comparison is particularly relevant considering the changes in the political context over the last decade. The results show that inequalities in political decision-making have decreased in recent years, and that the influence of men and women within their groups is becoming more equalised.

Keywords: selection; decision-making; Spanish parliament; representative parity; gender; influence

Resumen. *Presencia e influencia femenina: Las nuevas estrategias de selección y toma de decisiones en los parlamentos españoles*

La participación de las mujeres en la actividad política ha ido cambiando a lo largo de los años y ha generado una fuerte demanda por parte de la población femenina para participar en la toma de decisiones políticas. El objetivo de este artículo es determinar las consecuencias que las nuevas estrategias de selección de candidatos en los parlamentos españoles han tenido en la toma de decisiones grupales, con especial énfasis en las diferencias de género. Mediante dos encuestas realizadas a las élites políticas entre 2011 y 2018, se pretende comparar las percepciones de los representantes nacionales y regionales en dos momentos diferentes. Esta comparación es especialmente relevante si tenemos en cuenta los cambios que se han producido en el contexto político durante la última década. Los resultados son especialmente relevantes, ya que muestran que las desigualdades en la toma de decisiones políticas han disminuido en los últimos años, de modo que la influencia que tienen hombres y mujeres en sus grupos tiende a igualarse.

Palabras clave: selección; toma de decisiones; Parlamento español; paridad representativa; género; influencia

Summary

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1. Introduction

Decision-making responsibility within political parties is concentrated among a small number of individuals (Gallagher and Marsh, 1988), often with significant gender bias (Bjarnegård, 2013). This closed dynamic is due to the strong capacity of parliamentary systems to impose discipline (Linz, 1998). In Spain, as in other European countries, the existence of a proportional system of closed and blocked lists grants party leaders considerable power in the selection of candidates, incentivising members of parliament (MPs) to adhere rigorously to the guidelines set by leadership. Thus, MPs who wish to be re-elected or promoted must align themselves with the preferences of party leaders (Caballero, 2007; Sartori, 1994). While this institutional design reinforces the internal cohesion of groups, it can also limit the diversity of voices and perspectives within a given political party.

Some authors consider that openness in selection methods – allowing the inclusion of candidates from outside party structures on electoral lists – could undermine the internal cohesion of parliamentary groups (Hazan and Rahat, 2010), as it would permit the existence of factions and voices discordant with the party leadership. However, more recent studies (Cordero and Coller, 2015) argue that parliamentary group cohesion can also be achieved through other,

more deliberative processes without jeopardising the groups' voting unity. This suggests that an opening up of selection methods – for example, adopting a system of primary elections – could increase the decision-making influence of parliamentary group members without disrupting parliamentary cohesion.

The way parties select candidates for their electoral lists significantly influences the profiles of elected representatives (Linz et al., 2000) and, consequently, their legislative behaviour (Field and Siavelis, 2008; Norris and Lovenduski, 1995). The incorporation of new parties, such as Citizens and Podemos (UP), which have populated their lists with diverse political profiles, has led to an unprecedented renewal in the parliamentary political elite (Portillo-Pérez and Domínguez, 2020). However, the consequences of this renewal are yet to be determined. Furthermore, Spanish legislatures have experienced a gradual increase in the number of elected women since legal changes introduced a quota system (Bermúdez and Serrano, 2021; Santana et al., 2015; Verge et al., 2018). The effects of these changes on the parliamentary system are not yet fully understood, although some studies suggest that real power inequalities may be diminishing due to the incorporation of women into positions of power (Mathisen, 2024). However, the debate on political representation has evolved beyond descriptive representation, which is limited to quantifying the presence of women in institutions, towards approaches that consider substantive and symbolic representation. Substantive representation is understood as the real capacity of women to influence public agendas and policies, while symbolic representation refers to the transformation of the cultural meanings and values that female participation represents (Mansbridge, 1999). This enriched model should be complemented by intersectional theory, which clarifies that women are not a homogeneous group and that other identities, such as race, social class, or migration status, affect their political experience and their chances of achieving real power (Crenshaw, 2013; Viveros Vigoya, 2016).

In this context, the main objective of this article is to analyse the recent changes to candidate selection processes of Spanish political parties, and examine their impact on the influence of parliamentarians within their groups, with a special focus on gender bias. To achieve this objective, the following research questions are posed:

— How is the selection of candidates on the lists of Spanish political parties carried out, and how does it influence the political decision-making process within the parties?
— How does the inclusion of women in legislatures translate into influence within their respective caucuses?

This study draws on two surveys of political elites, from which we compare the perceptions of national and regional representatives at two different moments in time. Firstly, a survey of parliamentarians carried out by the CIS between 2009 and 2011 will provide insights into the opinions and attitudes of repre-

sentatives before the emergence of the 15M movement.[1] Then we analyse the survey of political elites from the CIUPARCRI project[2] conducted between 2018 and 2019, after the entry of new political forces into the Spanish parliament.

The main findings of this article indicate significant changes in the selection methods of parliamentarians, with a move towards homogenisation between the selection of men and women. Furthermore, women have been incorporated into the power structures of the assemblies to the same extent as men. Finally, women's capacity to influence decision-making within their respective parliamentary groups has also increased.

The article is structured as follows. Firstly, a theoretical approach to the selection methods of electoral candidates is presented, analysing its influence on the Spanish political system from a gender perspective. Next, the data and methodology are detailed. Subsequently, the results and main findings of the study are presented. Finally, the most relevant conclusions and contributions of the research are highlighted.

2. Decision-making in parliamentary groups

In today's representative democracy, parliaments have become "parliaments of groups" (Katz, 1987: 2). As such, parliamentary groups aspire to the formation and stability of governments. However, this stability relies on party discipline, a mechanism by which groups vote consistently according to the leaders' guidelines. Consequently, parliamentary groups accumulate power, considerably reducing the political autonomy of parliamentarians (Manin, 1998). This dynamic has become so entrenched that party and parliamentary group statutes even provide for sanctions against MPs who break voting unity (Sánchez de Dios, 1996).

One of the main causes of this phenomenon lies in the design of parliamentary systems such as the Spanish one, where the party has a significant capacity to impose discipline (Linz, 1998). Due to the proportional, closed-list, block-list electoral system, the accountability of parliamentarians is to party leadership bodies to a greater extent than to voters (Jerez-Mir et al., 2013; Sartori, 1994). Thus, representatives seeking to be included on electoral lists or to improve their organisational and institutional position have incentives to follow party guidelines and interests, putting them before their own and those of their constituents (Caballero, 2007).

From another perspective, some authors recognise the usefulness of coherence in voting, which becomes a functional necessity, since contemporary

1. The 15M Movement, also known as the "Indignados", was a citizens' movement that emerged in Spain on 15 May 2011. It was characterised by peaceful protests and sit-ins in public squares to demand political, social and economic change
2. Citizenship and Parliamentarians in Times of Crisis and Democracy: The Spanish Case in Southern Europe was a project funded by the Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness which, using the second wave of the Comparative Candidate Survey, surveyed 452 Spanish parliamentarians during 2018 and 2019.

assemblies organise their activity "not to make speeches but to make decisions" (Torres del Moral, 1981: 55). It also serves as an effective tool for policy formulation and oversight of government. Moreover, the cohesion of parliamentary groups provides stability and legitimacy to the parliamentary system (Heidar and Koole, 2000). This argument is particularly relevant in a climate of party system transformation and increased difficulty in forming governments (Llera, 2018).

The cohesion of parliamentary groups, and consequently the manner in which decisions are taken, is closely related to the electoral system. Moreover, the literature indicates that the electoral system significantly affects sociodemographic biases (Linz et al., 2000), as well as the legislative behaviour and social representativeness of representatives (Field and Siavelis, 2008; Norris and Lovenduski, 1995). For example, reforms undertaken to increase the inclusion of women in legislative chambers (Pérez-Moneo, 2012; Verge, 2007) have altered the composition of these chambers, both in terms of gender and other characteristics, such as age and level of education (Bermúdez and Serrano, 2021). This has translated into the emergence of new issues on political parties' agendas, and new forms of public policymaking (Sánchez Medero, 2010).

In recent decades, Western democracies have experienced a gradual democratisation of the internal workings of political parties (Barberá, 2018; Field and Siavelis, 2008). These countries, including Spain, have adopted more inclusive nomination processes (Rahat and Hazan, 2001) involving a greater number of actors. Accordingly, the openness of selection methods is expected to favour the influence of parliamentarians within their groups. Thus, the first hypothesis of this article (H1) suggests that the influence of both men and women is greater when selection methods are more inclusive.

Cordero and Coller (2015) also found that more open candidate selection methods have led to more deliberative decision-making by parliamentary groups. However, the effect of these changes on women's ability to influence parliamentary groups remains unknown. Consequently, this article addresses this knowledge gap by providing a specific perspective that assesses whether the changes affect men and women in the same way. Ultimately, decision-making in parliamentary caucuses rests in the hands of a few, namely party leaders. This is coupled with the fact that party leaders are predominantly male (Coller et al., 2018a), which creates a significant inequality in terms of women's participation in party decision-making (Kenny and Verge, 2016). In line with this research, Jaime-Castillo and Martínez-Cousinou (2018: 135) have observed that "despite the growth in the number of women in parliament, there are still differences in access to leadership positions in parliamentary groups in favour of men". Therefore, the second hypothesis (H2) considers that men have a greater capacity to influence than women.

In recent years, Spanish legislative chambers have achieved democratic parity, with female representation reaching 40% in 2016, a figure that has been maintained in subsequent legislatures. However, women remain underrepresented in positions of power within political parties (Verge and Wieseho-

meier, 2019). It is therefore crucial to investigate whether this increased female presence in legislative chambers has translated into real and effective power. Recent studies, such as that by Mathisen (2024) suggest that in Norway, the reduction in gender inequality regarding political influence is due to the increased number of women in parliament, thus balancing influence between genders. For Spain, a similar behaviour is expected: that the inclusion of more women in decision-making bodies will afford them a capacity for influence comparable to that of men. Therefore, the third hypothesis (H3) states that greater equality in the composition of governing bodies leads to greater equality in decision-making influence.

3. The selection of women candidates in Spanish parliaments

Institutional design plays a key role in candidate selection (Bermúdez and Cordero, 2016). However, the legal regulation of internal selection processes is practically non-existent,[3] which has given parties considerable freedom in their selection of candidates (Pérez-Moneo, 2012). For example, the PSOE ("Partido Socialista Obrero Español") in 1998 and the IU ("Izquierda Unida") in 2007 both held primaries to choose their candidate for the presidency of the government (Boix, 1998; Hopkin, 2001). Subsequently, there have been other instances at the local and regional levels, especially among left-wing parties. However, these isolated events did not lead to greater democratisation of the parties, but occurred on an ad hoc basis, sometimes with the aim of boosting opposition candidacies with unsuccessful forecasts (Barberá et al., 2014; Jiménez-Sánchez, Coller and Portillo-Pérez, 2018). It was not until the arrival of the new parties that the practice of holding primary elections for the remaining members of the electoral lists became widespread (Barberá, 2018). Thus, the remarkable change in the profile of political representatives over the last decade (Portillo-Pérez and Domínguez, 2020) was preceded by a change in the selection strategy, either through the opening of selection methods or the incorporation of measures that favour the inclusion of women.

In contrast to majoritarian systems, which prioritise socially dominant groups (Krook 2009), electoral system reforms designed to improve gender quotas aim to implement parity democracy (Sánchez Medero, 2010), the balanced composition of electoral lists presented in elections. For parity democracy to be realised, and for women to be elected through the electoral selection process, female candidates must be placed in achievable positions (Lombardo and Verge, 2017), either at the top of electoral lists or at least in a promising

3. Article 6 of the Spanish Constitution requires political parties to democratise their "internal structure and functioning". Furthermore, in 2015, the reform of the law on political parties was approved, adding to the constitutional premise the establishment of "formulas for the direct participation of members in the terms set out in their Statutes, especially in the election processes of the highest governing body of the party" (Article 7.1. of Organic Law 6/2002, of 27 June, on Political Parties, amended by Article 2.5 of Law 3/2015, of 30 March).

position. Within each five-seat bracket, neither gender should have less than 40% representation. Gender quotas on electoral lists can be divided into two types: quotas applied to the list itself, and quotas applied to the election result (the number of seats to be filled by women) (Serra, 2008). This is because not only has there been a lower percentage of women candidates overall, but the percentage of women on the list who subsequently secure a representative position has also been lower.

The representation of women in the Congress of Deputies has increased markedly over the years. In the first and second Spanish legislatures (1979 – 1986), almost all seats were held by men (94%). These figures changed slightly in the third term (1986 – 1989), with men holding 92% of seats and women 8%. Women's representation in the lower house became somewhat more noticeable in the fourth and fifth legislatures (1989 – 1996), increasing to 13.7%, compared to 86.3% male representation. This trend continued in subsequent legislatures, increasing the number of women in the chamber, and finally achieving representative parity in the tenth legislature (2011 – 2016) with a female presence of 40.3% compared to a 59.7% male presence. Parity democracy was achieved in Congress in 2008 and has been maintained in subsequent legislatures. This phenomenon extends to the regional parliaments, where, from 2015 to 2016, women's representation was very similar to that of men (Coller et al., 2018b). However, while numerical equality is necessary, it is not solely sufficient for substantive equality, which is understood as the real exercise of political influence in the absence of structural disadvantages associated with gender. To measure the real power of women, it is useful to analyse not only their presence in the legislative chambers, but also their integration into decision-making bodies. It should be noted that the Permanent Deputation proportionally represents the different groups in the chamber and, in practice, is made up of the members of the Bureau of each House, the group spokespersons, and other pertinent male and female deputies within the parties. Moreover, the members of the Permanent Deputation maintain all the rights and prerogatives of parliamentary representatives when the chamber has been dissolved, or its term has expired (Peña Jiménez, 2018). In other words, the people who constitute this body are those who wield the most power within their group. The percentage of women in the Permanent Deputation has also been progressively increasing, reaching almost 40% in 2016. At the same time, the difference between the percentage of women parliamentarians in the plenary body and in the substitute body has decreased.

The same pattern is evident in the regional assemblies; the percentage of women in the first legislatures was as low as their representation in the permanent deputations of the chambers (between 6% and 7% for the first two legislatures). However, while the percentage of women parliamentarians is growing rapidly, the incorporation of women into decision-making bodies is slower. It was not until 2016 that women achieved 40% representation in the Permanent Deputation. This figure was consolidated in the last legislature, where the presence in both plenary sessions and Permanent Deputations exceeded 45%. In

short, the increase in the number of women in legislative chambers, motivated by the adoption of legislative quotas and by the promotion of other egalitarian measures by political parties, has transformed the social profile of parliaments. In recent legislatures, Spanish legislative chambers have achieved parity. From the perspective of descriptive representation, parliaments today are a better reflection of the social body than they were a few decades ago (Verge et al., 2018). Consequently, this study aims to test whether their increased presence has any effect on women's ability to influence political decision-making.

4. Data and methods

The aim of this article is to ascertain the consequences of new selection strategies for the decision-making process of parliamentary groups, with a special focus on gender differences. Two main databases have been analysed: the 2011 CIS study 2827 of political elites, with 580 responses, and the CIUPARCRI project survey carried out in 2018 with the participation of 452 representatives. We compared these surveys because of their identical methodology and population: they are both regional and national surveys of Spanish parliamentarians. Both surveys include representatives of the 17 regional chambers, the Congress of Deputies and the Senate. Therefore, the intention is to capture the differences between these historical moments. This comparison is particularly relevant when considering the changes in the political context that have taken place in the last decade, especially in the transformation of the party system and the renewal of parliamentary elites (Llera, 2018; Portillo-Pérez and Domínguez, 2020).

The dependent variable of the study is the influence of parliamentarians within their own group, measured on a scale of 1–10, where 1 is "little influence" and 10 is "a lot of influence" on decisions taken by the parliamentary group. This variable was operationalised on the basis of the following question: "On a scale of 1–10, where 1 is little and 10 is a lot, to what extent do you have influence over the decisions taken in your parliamentary group?" The selection provides a subjective insight into the perceptions of male and female parliamentarians and their position of power within the group, as well as a comparison between the two years studied and any differences that may exist according to the gender of the interviewees.

The data are presented descriptively, alongside other explanatory analyses. To explore differences in the dependent variable, differences by gender are examined through a comparison of means. In addition, three linear regression models are used (two for 2011 and one for 2018) to study the factors affecting the degree of influence of political representatives. The analyses were conducted using the STATA statistical software, which was also used to assess the main statistical assumptions of the models, including the normality of residuals, homoscedasticity, and the absence of multicollinearity among the independent variables. The verification of these assumptions confirms that the requirements necessary to assume the validity of the models have been met.

The following independent variables are included in these regression models. To determine the impact of gender on the influence of the representatives, this variable is introduced with the values 1 = women, 0 = men. The differences by political party are also considered (Partido Popular (PP), Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE), Izquierda Unida (IU) and MPs from subnational parties (PANE) for model 1; PP, PSOE, UP, Ciudadanos and PANE for model 2[4]). Furthermore, the forms of selection include the power held by leaders (national, regional and local) to select candidates, groups or currents (on a scale of 1–7, where 1 is "little power" and 7 is "a lot of power"). In addition, the analyses include variables for legislatures in parliament (number of legislatures), whether they belong to the Permanent Deputation (1 = belongs, 0 = does not belong[5]), and the territorial level of the parliament (1 = autonomous, 0 = national). As Verge and Astudillo (2019) point out, having children can affect the time availability of political representatives, and therefore, their promotion in their professional careers, especially in the case of women. Therefore, the variable of having children (1=has, 0=does not have) is included as a control. The analyses to test the hypotheses set out above are presented below.

5. Results

The capacity of influence of Spanish male and female parliamentarians is measured on a scale from 1 to 10, representing the parliamentarians' perception of the power they have within their group. Table 1 provides a comparison of averages for each period studied, divided according to gender.

Table 1. Comparison of averages of parliamentarians' ability to influence their respective parliamentary groups

	2011		2018	
Group	**Mean**	**Standard dev.**	**Mean**	**Standard dev.**
Men (N)	6.13 (342)	2	5.99 (254)	2.16
Women (N)	5.62 (225)	1.99	6.02 (184)	2.22
Total (N)	5.93 (567)		6 (438)	
	t = 3.0065, p = 0.0028		t = -0.1211, p = 0.9037	

Source: Author's elaboration using data from CIS study 2827 (2011) and CIUPARCRI project (2018).

Note: Survey question used: "On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is a little and 10 is a lot, to what extent do you have influence over decisions made in your parliamentary group?"

Table 1 contrasts the differences in men's and women's ability to influence their respective parliamentary groups. The comparison shows that the averages have tended to equalise: while statistically significant differences were

4. In the PANE category, all other non-state parties have been included (ERC, PNV, BNG, CDC, CC, Foro Asturias, JuntsxCat, MES Mallorca, PAR, PRC, UPN, Nueva Canarias).
5. This variable could only be included for the 2011 model.

evident in the 2011 sample, with men having more influence than women, these differences (and their significance) disappeared in 2018. Furthermore, there was a significant increase in women's influence (from 5.6 to 6). These initial results suggest that certain changes in recent years are impacting the greater participation of women parliamentarians in group decision-making. In other words, unlike in 2011, the 2018 survey data suggest that women are just as influential as men in their respective groups. Although the results show a significant decrease in the differences in influence between men and women in parliamentary groups, this numerical equality does not imply absolute equality in terms of substantive representation. Feminist literature highlights the existence of horizontal segregation, whereby women tend to be concentrated in committees related to care, health and social rights, while men predominate in areas with greater political and economic influence (Verge et al., 2018). Intersectionality adds complexity by indicating that racialised women, migrants, or women in unfavourable socioeconomic situations face additional barriers that are invisible in analyses based solely on gender (Gandarias Goikoetxea et al., 2019). We now explore whether these changes are caused by the opening up of selection methods. Table 2 shows the changes in selection methods over the last few years. In both cases (2011 and 2018), nomination by others is the main form of selection for both men and women, although with some differences that have narrowed over time. The proliferation of primary elections may explain why both men and women are increasingly opting to nominate themselves, although men continue to nominate themselves to a greater extent than women. There is also a significant change in the number of fixed parliamentarians, with fewer men taking their nomination for granted and a higher percentage of women believing their place on the list to be secure. These data indicate that the differences are narrowing as forms of selection are tending towards homogenisation between men and women.

Within the category of candidates "proposed by others", the data also reveals differences between the two time periods analysed. In 2011, almost two-thirds of candidates were selected by party bodies or leaders, especially young people and women, with only 3% selected by the grassroots, mainly

Table 2. Selection methods reported by MPs in 2011 and 2018 by gender (%)

	2011		2018	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Nominated by others	72	89	79	83
Self-nominated	6	4	10	6
Nomination taken for granted	16	5	11	10
Other	6	2	0	1
Total (N)	100 (347)	100 (229)	100 (254)	100 (195)

Source: Author's elaboration using data from CIS study 2827 (2011) and CIUPARCRI project (2018).

Note: Survey question used: "How, if at all, did your choice to be on the lists come about?"

in left-wing and nationalist parties (Coller, Cordero and Echevarren, 2018). Conversely, in 2018, up to 24% reported being selected by primaries, compared to 52% by leaders. However, newer parties are more likely to use more inclusive selection methods (Pérez-Nievas et al., 2021).

Some studies suggest that primaries have negative effects on the numbers of women nominated (Ashe et al., 2010; Gauja and Cross, 2015). In Spain, both in national and regional chambers, primaries tend to favour the selection of men, while women are more often selected by leaders. Some authors (Pérez-Nievas et al., 2021) have found significant differences in the inclusion of women on electoral lists compared to men. They suggest that leaders help to correct the imbalances produced by primaries, especially for women with children. Political life demands a high level of availability in terms of travel and schedules, which significantly impacts the life-work balance. This is reflected in a 2002 CIS survey of the Spanish population, where 62% of men and 77% of women believed that women find it more difficult than men to hold positions in politics (Verge et al., 2018).

However, selection methods tend to become more uniform, resulting in men and women being selected in similar ways. The following section explores whether there are gender differences in the reasons for inclusion on electoral lists.

According to Table 3, neither the 2011 nor 2018 data indicate significant differences in the average number of men and women citing dedication to the party and professional preparation as reasons for their selection. However, in 2011, differences were apparent regarding experience in political institutions.

Table 3. Reasons why men and women are selected for electoral lists in 2011 and 2018 (%)

	2011			2018		
	Men	Women	Total (difference)	Men	Women	Total (difference)
Dedication to the party	4.03	3.96	4 (0.06)	3.76	3.8	3.78 (-0.04)
Experience in representative institutions (city councils, parliaments)	**3.87**	**3.62**	**3.77* (0.24)**	3.61	3.38	3.51 (0.23)
Personal support from a party leader	**3.43**	**3.18**	**3.33* (0.25)**	3.59	3.43	3.52 (0.16)
Professional preparation	3.77	3.73	3.75 (0.04)	3.95	3.89	3.92 (0.06)
Prestige, notoriety, popularity	**3.68**	**3.38**	**3.56* (0.29)**	3.8	3.66	3.74 (0.14)
Role as a representative of the interests of a particular group (women, youth, immigrants, ...)				2.55	3	2.74* (-0.44)

Source: Author's elaboration using data from CIS study 2827 (2011) and CIUPARCRI project (2018).

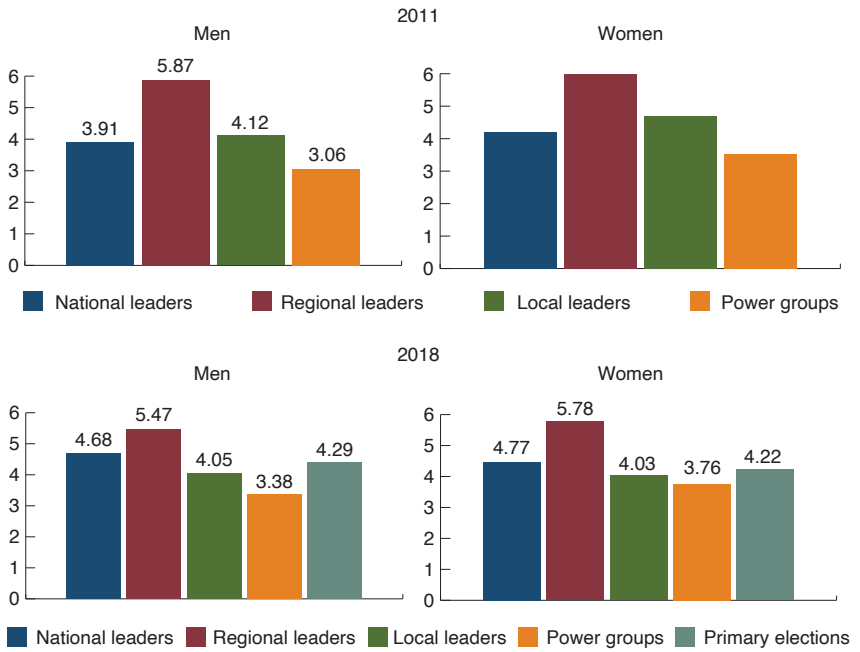
Note 1: Survey questions used: "In your case, why do you think you were offered the position on the electoral list or your offer to be on the list was accepted?" "I am going to give you a set of criteria and I would like you to tell me whether, in your case, it was 5, very, 4, quite, 3, somewhat, 2, a little or 1, not at all, important for you to be offered a place on the electoral list." Note 2: significance level * $p<0.05$

Men believed that their prior experience in city councils or parliaments contributed to their selection to a greater extent than women did. Differences were also observed in the perceived personal support of a leader: men, on average, perceived greater support than women, and considered, to a greater extent than women, that their prestige, fame and popularity aided their selection. These differences disappear in the 2018 survey, where gender-based differences are only evident in the representation of the interests of a specific group. In this instance, women perceived that their advocacy for particular groups contributed to their selection, with statistically significant differences compared to men. This aligns with the theory of horizontal segregation (Verge et al., 2018).

Overall, the preceding tables indicate a trend towards homogenisation in the selection methods for men and women. Nevertheless, the openness of selection methods must be considered in relation to the power held by certain party bodies in nominating candidates. This differentiation is illustrated in the following graph.

Figure 1 illustrates the power of specific party leaders and power groups in selecting candidates for electoral lists. The averages suggest that regional

Figure 1. Power to select candidates for electoral lists in 2011 and 2018 by gender (average)



Source: Author's elaboration using data from CIS study 2827 (2011) and CIUPARCRI project (2018).
Note 1: Survey question used: "I am going to give you a scale from 1 to 7, where 1 is "a little" and 7 is "a lot" and I would like you to tell me how much power the following groups have in your party to select candidates for parliament."

leaders wield the most power within the organisations, followed by local and national leaders. A distinction can be drawn between the two periods studied: for both men and women, local leaders were more powerful than national leaders in 2011, whereas, in 2018, national leaders held the most power (after regional leaders). Generally, there are no significant gender-based differences in the perception of power held by the different leaders. However, it is worth noting that, in 2018, the power of primaries (averaging 4.2 out of 7) to select candidates emerged strongly, undoubtedly indicating a shift towards a more inclusive selection model.

Finally, linear regression was used to test the effects of the independent variables on the influence of parliamentarians on their respective groups (dependent variable). Table 4 presents three different models: the first two analyse the 2011 samples, separated by gender (model 1 for men, model 2 for women), and model 3 includes all respondents from 2018. This differentiation is due to previous analyses showing differences in the behaviour of men and women with respect to the 2011 survey, but not with respect to the 2018 survey.

The gender differences in the first two models with respect to the 2011 sample reveals some interesting data. For example, regarding the parties, only the men of the IU have a higher degree of influence than women in their

Table 4. Linear regression on the influence capacity of parliamentarians in 2011 and 2018

	M1: Men 2011	M2: Women 2011	M3: Complete 2018
Female (ref. Male)			0.036 (0.225)
PSOE (ref. PP)	–0.117 (0.24)	–0.255 (0.306)	0.338 (0.291)
IU (ref. PP)	2.18*** (0.634)	1.903 (2.097)	
UP (ref. PP)			0.425 (0.393)
Citizens (ref. PP)			0.163 (0.463)
Other PANE (ref. PP)	0.282 (0.398)	0.816 (0.548)	0.526 (0.425)
Member of the Permanent Deputation	1.35*** (0.313)	0.989 (0.515)	
Autonomous Parliament (ref. CCGG)	0.835*** (0.234)	1.278*** (0.321)	0.7591*** (0.263)
Legislatures	0.20* (0.89)	0.295* (0.143)	0.275*** (0.097)
Power to select: National leaders	0.03 (0.056)	–0.043 (0.073)	0.045 (0.056)
Power to select: Regional leaders	0.075 (0.086)	0.039 (0.114)	0.062 (0.078)
Power to select: Local leaders	0.087 (0.061)	0.099 (0.88)	–0.046 (0.075)
Power to select: Power groups within the party	–0.144* (0.072)	–0.107 (0.098)	–0.05 (0.77)
Power to select: Primary			0.261*** (0.057)
Children	–0.532 (0.321)	–0.596* (0.299)	–1.205 (0.222)
Constant	4.652*** (0.704)	4.048*** (0.889)	2.934*** (0.64)
R2	0.1961	0.2061	0.1106
R2 Adjusted	0.1647	0.1586	0.0785
N	294	196	375

Source: Author's elaboration using data from CIS study 2827 (2011) and CIUPARCRI project (2018).

* $p<0.05$; ** $p<0.01$; *** $p<0.001$

group. In the 2011 survey, men also have more influence if they belong to the Permanent Deputation; however, it is not the same for women who are members of this body. Differences are also found in parliamentarians' perceptions of the power of leaders or power groups: greater power of party groups to select candidates reduces the influence of parliamentarians, but this is not believed to be the case for women. Similarly, models 1 and 2 illustrate the positive and significant impact of having more experience and regional support on MPs' influence. The 2011 models also reveal differences in the influence of parliamentarians depending on whether they have children. For women, being a mother leads to a lower degree of influence on the parliamentary group, while no such effect is found for men.

Model 3 uses the full sample from the 2018 survey, as no significant differences were observed when splitting the sample by gender. The explanatory power of this model is lower, finding significance only in the variables of legislature, territorial level of parliament, and the power to select candidates in primary elections. Firstly, the influence of regional parliamentarians increases relative to national parliamentarians. Secondly, parliamentary experience, measured by the number of legislatures served, also increases the probability of gaining influence within the group. These two variables coincide with models 1 and 2. Finally, the model concludes that greater power to select primary candidates increases the influence of parliamentarians in the group.

Ultimately, the models reveal some differences between respondents in 2011 and 2018, although these differences are more pronounced between male and female respondents to the 2011 survey. The analyses also show that opening up selection methods to the power of primary elections to nominate candidates increases the influence of representatives. Furthermore, analysis of the two time periods indicates that the influence of men was not greater than that of women in 2018, although this was the case in the earlier 2011 survey. Finally, although the descriptive analyses indicate that parity was reached in the chambers' governing bodies in 2018, coinciding with women perceiving their capacity for influence to be equal to that of men, the explanatory analysis has not been able to demonstrate that these differences are explicitly attributable to this.

6. Conclusions and contributions

The study of decision-making in parliamentary groups has a long history in Spanish political science (Caballero, 2007; Sánchez de Dios, 1996; Torres del Moral, 1981), although it has rarely been analysed from the perspective of the political representatives themselves (Jaime-Castillo and Martínez-Cousinou, 2018). Furthermore, despite studies that highlight the difficulties women face in accessing leadership positions in political parties (Verge and Wiesehomeier, 2019), there has been no in-depth analysis of the inequalities that the Spanish parliamentary system demonstrates in terms of the capacity of male and female parliamentarians to influence their respective groups.

Consequently, this article has sought to assess the power differences between male and female members of Spanish legislatures in two different periods. The transformation of the party system (Llera, 2018) and the adoption of new, more inclusive selection methods (Barberá, 2018) have allowed us to analyse the legislative consequences of these changes on decision-making in the Spanish parliamentary system.

This article has demonstrated that while significant differences existed in men's and women's influence over their parliamentary groups in 2011, these disparities had disappeared by 2018. In recent years, the influence of men and women has tended to equalise, a phenomenon potentially attributable to two factors. Firstly, new selection strategies, and the adoption of quotas, have favoured the incorporation of more women in legislative assemblies, reaching 40% in the autonomous regions in 2011, and in the Congress of Deputies in 2015. However, this increased representation did not immediately translate into real power; it was not until 2016 that women achieved parity in the Permanent Deputation at both levels.

Secondly, there have been major changes in selection methods in recent years. The data indicate that the differences in how men and women are selected have tended to homogenise. Descriptive analyses have shown a reduction in gender differences in selection processes and rationales. This suggests that changes in selection methods and strategies have had a tangible impact on group decision-making, leading to the disappearance of disparities in influence.

The analyses support the claim that the opening of selection methods through primary elections significantly increases the influence of members of parliament. However, this article has only partially confirmed that equal membership of decision-making bodies for women increases women's influence within their respective groups. The data show that these two circumstances have coincided over time, although a causal relationship could not be definitely established.

Another limitation of the article is the moderate explanatory power of the models regarding the observed variability. This may be because certain variables not considered in the analysis could play a crucial role in the phenomenon under study. The data suggest that other variables related to contextual elements (political circumstances), party-specific factors (internal political culture and operating rules), and even personal factors (professional trajectory, experience, political capital, and informal networks) may also be relevant.

In this regard, certain methodological limitations should also be acknowledged. To deepen this line of research, future studies could explore multilevel models that capture structural differences across parties or territories and assess the explanatory capacity of macro-level factors on individual influence. Likewise, binary logistic regression models examining the likelihood of holding internal leadership positions could provide complementary insights into potential gender-based inequalities in decision-making, in line with the patterns suggested by our analyses.

Because of the aforementioned limitations, several questions requiring further analysis have been identified. Firstly, it would be relevant to determine

the varying internal party strategies regarding the incorporation of women on their candidate lists. Furthermore, it is important to ascertain the personal characteristics of the women who ultimately hold executive positions or seats on the governing bodies of legislatures (or chambers), and whether these differ compared to men in similar roles. Pursuing these questions could lead to the identification of additional variables that would enhance the explanatory power of the phenomenon under study. Similarly, exploring additional models may reveal other explanations worth considering.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that this article has attempted to explore the consequences of descriptive representation (presence) on group decision-making (influence). However, the study of substantive or symbolic representation has not been considered. Other studies show that most elected women MPs are concentrated on parliamentary committees dedicated to disability, equality, women, immigration, health, social welfare or human rights. On the other hand, men outnumber women two to one on international relations, infrastructure, industry, economy, and territorial policy committees. A horizontal segregation of legislative activity is observed whereby women are assigned to, or specialise in, areas that are more focused on caring for people (Verge et al., 2018). In future studies, the authors consider it essential to examine the impact of this horizontal segregation on public policymaking in order to enhance our understanding of female political representation, with close attention to research that incorporates intersectionality as a central category. This approach would allow us to examine not only numerical presence, but also the capacity for symbolic and practical transformation in politics (Gelabert, 2017).

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