Understanding Women's Representation in Chile

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ABSTRACT

Chile represents an interesting dichotomy on the role of women in politics and government. Although Chile's president is female and is serving her second term, relatively few women serve at the national and local levels of government. This paper organizes the current literature aiding in understanding women's representation in Chile taking into account the historical, social, and cultural background as well as candidate selection, gender quotas, and dominating political parties within Chile. Moreover, this study then reports on the findings of a survey that looked at Chileans' views of women in politics and government. The data was collected using both ethnographic research and a cross sectional survey of Chileans. The results of this study suggest that Chileans favor and support women's representation in the Chilean government, but some acknowledge the low levels of women's representation and barriers faced by many women historically and currently.

INTRODUCTION

In Latin America, Chile has long been considered one of the most patriarchal countries making it a fitting region to perform research on women's representation (Romero, 2013). Presently, Chile has become somewhat of an anomaly as it is governed by a female president serving her second term, and scholars would still argue about the existence of deeply rooted patriarchal ties within the Chilean society. To thoroughly understand women's representation in Chile today, we need to recognize the historical, social, and cultural background as well as the theoretical framework which stems from the roles of political parties and candidate selection, ingrained social norms, and electoral laws. With three months of fieldwork in Chile and the use of a cross-sectional survey, this paper sheds light on the social patterns and structures in Chile and Chileans' perceptions of women's representation in politics and government.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In 1970, Chile had their first socialist president, Salvador Allende, who remained in power for three years until he was overthrown by a military coup. Even though he was socialist, Allende "articulated a view of women that confined them, generally speaking, to the domestic sphere and their traditional roles as wives and mothers" upholding the traditional gender roles of women (Maloof, 1999, p. 119). Following Allende's presidency, the dictatorship of Pinochet brought the relationship between the patriarchal structure of the family and authoritarianism to the forefront. To understand this relationship, it can be said that the family structure as well as the socialization of children, the assignment of gender roles, education, factory work, and political parties were designed in an authoritarian manner (p. 126). Julieta Kirkwood, a Chilean sociologist, "has pointedly stated that the Chilean dictatorship was successful at driving down its authoritarian and patriarchal discourse, not only by virtue of its ability to exercise total power, but also thanks to society's underlying authoritarianism" ("Women and media in Latin America," 1999, p. 9).

The Pinochet regime brought about discontent in society leading to protests and defiance greatly impacting social movements. Although the women's movement defied the authoritarian regime, some argue that the transition to a democratic government did not improve the lives of Chilean women (Maloof, 1999, p. 125). The justification for this is because the women's movement remained independent from the government with no formal links to the political parties and no form of bargaining powers (Matear, 1997, p. 91).

Role of Political Parties:

Today, the two longstanding political coalitions dominate the elections within Chile acting as a barrier to women's representation. These parties are divided between the center left, the *Concertación* formed by six political parties, and the right, formed by the *Unión Demócrata Independiente* (UDI) and the *Renovación Nacional*. Recent research has suggested that a more exclusive and centralized candidate selection is beneficial to women's representation because it allows women to bypass self-nomination and power networks (Hinojosa, 2012, p. 3). Although decentralized and inclusive parties would appear to be more democratic, they unexpectedly and unintentionally suppress female candidates because self-nomination is less likely amongst women (p. 3). Parties

such as the UDI in Chile follow a centralized and exclusive candidate selection becoming the political party in Chile that places the most women in local governments (Hinojosa, 2009, p. 378). Noria Nuñez—sociologist and president of the Institute for Women Foundation—further explains, "Parties have made it difficult for women to participate in politics, and since we don't have a quota law in Chile, it's difficult for women to enter into politics. There is an inter-party decision-making structure and on the lower levels, in communes and municipalities, there are no women, or they are underrepresented" (Segall, 2014). In 2013, 80 percent of candidates nominated by political parties were male and no political party has been able to exceed 25 percent in female representation nationally (Segall, 2014). Evidently, an inherent amount of power is placed in the hands of political parties and they hold a significant role within the Chilean government.

Role of Gender Quotas:

In terms of gender quotas, some research has proven them to be relatively successful in some of the Latin American countries. Earliest studies have found gender quotas to increase women's participation on the national level by 5 percent, and today the average is at 10 percent (Hinojosa, 2009, p. 136). Argentina was the first country to enact gender quotas in Latin America, but the delegation continued to be divided by partisan differences and until 2015, Chile did not have a gender quota law, which left obstacles in the way of Chilean women (Gray, 2003, p. 74). President Bachelet introduced a gender quota law at the party level reversing the byzantine electoral system that had been enforced since the Pinochet regime (Reuters, 2015). Interior Minister Rodrigo Peñailillo positively notes, "After 25 years this allows us to end an electoral system that was unique in the world and which has done much damage to Chilean democracy" (Reuters, 2015). Free Speech Radio News (2014) reported this quota would require parties to submit lists where no more than 60 percent of a gender can dominate. Given that political parties determine the nominations and names on the ballots, this quota law at the party level is a step toward leveling representation.

Studies based in both Argentina and Chile have found data to prove gender quotas have the ability to increase the representation of women; however, the marginalization of women within government occurs as does the lack of addressing gender issues (Gray, 2003, p. 53) Consequently, this inhibits feminist agendas and initiatives although the number of women in government is increasing. Franceschet (2001) argues, "The experience of political women in Chile reveals that parties will respond favourably to feminist demands only insofar as they benefit—or believe they will benefit—from doing so" (p. 211). Some studies have even suggested that people in Latin America favor increasing women's representation and in countries where women are not adequately represented overall trust in their government and perception of democracy falls (Schwindt-Bayer, 2010). More proportionate gender laws at both the party and state level could serve to increase women's representation and also reflect the desires of the citizens.

Social and Cultural Context:

As previously stated, Chile has become some sort of an anomaly, particularly with women's representation in government. Claudia Bucciferro, Gonzaga University, expressed, "In the last fifty years, Chile has changed rapidly. It has gone from having the most stable democratic tradition of Latin America, to a socialist experiment, a brutal military intervention, a harsh and enduring dictatorship, and a negotiated transition to democracy completed by a popularly elected government that embraced European social-democratic values" (Raisheve-Stover & Ibroscheva, 2014, p. 217). The dictatorship brought about a great divide between Chileans, but also a need for reconciliation within their country. During the initial inauguration of President Bachelet, Chile was in a period of changing their national identity and Bachelet stood as a symbol of "hope, equality, resilience, forgiveness, strength" given her survival of political imprisonment, prosecution, and exile during the Pinochet regime (p. 217).

With the presidency of Michelle Bachelet, the ingrained social norms existing in Chile became more evident. Bachelet initially brought gendered politics to the forefront and because she was female, attacks on her abilities largely reflected "the continuing sexism of Chile's political culture" (Thomas, 2011, p. 65). As gender roles are defined in society, in the political sphere, gendered definitions of politics and political leadership also exist with a strong association to masculine roles (p. 66). Based on these typical associations, surveys and analyses found President Bachelet to be viewed as less competent compared to the two male candidates who ran against her (p. 76). The two candidates who ran against Bachelet were perceived as more paternal, suggesting that the relationship between authoritarianism and the patriarchal family structure is reflected in gender socialization. The first presidential election of Michelle Bachelet showed "how candidates' portrayal of their leadership and debates over the type of leadership abilities needed by a president are fundamentally shaped by gender" (p. 77).

Due to the low representation of women in government and the need for gender laws to balance the playing field between genders across Latin America, the socialization of gender roles and in some cases, sexism, is not an

unlikely factor contributing to the representation of women in government. Marta Lagos, director of Latinobarómetro, a Chilean polling firm, believes ingrained sexism is carried on throughout Latin America (Romero, 2013). On the contrary, while political roles in Chile are defined by how they were socialized, some research has found the majority of the public throughout Latin America and even particularly Chileans to favor increasing women's representation (Hinojosa, 2012, p. 39). Even more significantly, there is survey data suggesting voter biases are nonexistent in national elections, but women do face limited discrimination in politics due to social norms (p. 39).

Chileans may be in favor of having a female president; however, a feminist agenda is not desirable amongst Chileans. "The issue became emblematic for what having "a woman President" meant: it mattered on a symbolic level, but on a practical one, it didn't make a great difference" (Raicheva-Stover & Ibroscheva, 2014, p. 221). This suggests that there is a shift in how Chileans view gender roles as they are accepting of women assuming political leadership positions, but on the contrary, addressing women's rights is still overlooked.

Contemporary Chile:

Decades after the democratic transition, women's representation has without a doubt seen change, but there continues to be room for improvement. Based on the rankings of the World Economic Forum, Chile's ranking with regards to political empowerment has gone from a ranking of 66 in 2013 to a ranking of 35 in 2014 (World Economic Forum, 2014). Following up on that, Paulina Weber, Director of the Movement for Emancipation of Chilean Women, expressed, "Chile is one of the 'most backward countries' in Latin America when it comes to gender equality" (Dekimpe, 2014). The changes in rankings of political empowerment have seen fluctuations going back and forth (Dekimpe, 2014).

On that note, data from ComunidadMujer, a large nongovernmental organization (NGO) in Chile that actively researches women and gender studies, found within the last year very low numbers of women on national and local levels of government. The percentage of female senators and deputies since 1989 has seen only a 10 percent increase bringing both female deputies and senators to 15.8 percent in 2014 (ComunidadMujer, 2014, p. 3). Female senators have remained constant from 1989 until 2006 at 5.3%. The sharp increase correlates with President Bachelet's first term in 2006.

Similarly, on a local level in 2012, female councilors were reported at 24.9 percent and female mayors were reported at 12.5 percent (p. 3). Based on the studies conducted by ComunidadMujer, women's representation on both the national and local levels remain significantly disproportionate. Data in terms of mayoral and council members appear to be increasing at a slow rate (Hinojosa, 2009, p. 383). Table 1 demonstrates the number of men and women in mayoral and council member positions throughout several periods from 1992-2004.

Table 1. Women in Local Politics

	Men	*Women*	*% Women*
1992			
Mayor	400	32	7.4
Council Member	1434	216	13.1
1996			
Mayor	309	32	9.4
Council Member	1531	258	14.4
2000			
Mayor	299	42	12.3
Council Member	1475	308	17.3
2004			
Mayor	303	42	12.2
Council Member	1230	450	26.8

SOURCE: The information in this table was originally presented on page 384 of Magda Hinojosa. 2009. "'Whatever the Party Asks of Me': Candidate Selection and Women's Political Representation in Chile's UDI" *Politics & Gender*. 5(3): 377-407.

The increase in women's representation in government is rather minimal and slow. Critics have expressed differing conclusions in terms of progress or regression. Considering President Bachelet's cabinet, she appointed

nine women to her 23 member cabinet compared to 10 women out of 22 members in her first term. The trend of underrepresentation became more apparent with her selection of undersecretaries, which was only 11 women out of 32 members (Segall, 2014). On one hand, Bachelet has been promising to create policies that would promote women's representation and she has been working to address women's issues from abortion and beyond. Lilia Concha Carreño, newly appointed National Arts and Culture Council Undersecretary, expressed a positive outlook on Bachelet's appointments arguing even though gender equality has not been met, these appointments show substantial progress (Segall, 2014). Further, Segall (2014) notes that the regression in the cabinet goes beyond the number of women appointed, but also some are arguing the appointments were made in less visible ministries.

METHODOLOGY

Based on previous literature of women's representation in Chile, I hypothesized that there is a correlation between Chileans and the conservative traditional views of women; therefore, Chileans have a tendency to vote for male candidates because of social and cultural norms and thus women within government is limited.

My methodology included ethnographic research studying the social patterns and structures in Chile and issuing a cross sectional survey to Chileans in order to understand how Chileans perceive women serving in politics and government. My survey consisted of twelve close ended questions and four open ended questions. The open ended questions were numerically coded based on the trends and similarities that I found. These codes draw collective conclusions based on shared opinions and perspectives.

The fieldwork was conducted in Santiago, Chile, the capital city and home to 6 million people—35% of the country's population. Because of the vastness and diversity in Santiago, this city provided a large sample. My sample population size included 242 individuals. I obtained my subjects by using my prior connections and networking with both professionals and everyday people. I utilized Qualtrics, an online survey software, to obtain the great majority of the responses and I also surveyed a handful of people at random as I did fieldwork in Santiago.

The sample population was balanced in terms of gender with 112 female, 116 male, 9 other and 2 preferring not to specify. With regards to age, there was not perfect representation amongst years born which may correspond with the limited people I had access to as well as the use of online survey software, understanding that not everyone, specifically older generations, has access to the internet or opt not to utilize the internet. To determine age, I categorized this by a specific time period to take into context Chile's political history and social movements using years 1930-1950, 1951-1970, 1971-1990, and 1991-2015. The majority of respondents (125 subjects) were born during 1971-1990. Although, the demographic information provided by the Central Intelligence Agency (2015) reveals that there is consistency between the respondent's ages and Chile's population. About 20% of the population is born from 2001-2015, about 16% born from 1991-2000, about 43% from 1961-1990, about 10% from 1951-1960 and about 10% from earlier years to 1950.

In terms of level of education, all respondents answered positively to having some level of education. Acknowledging Chile's high literacy rate of 97.5% and increasing enrollment, this can aid in justifying the lack of uneducated individuals in the survey. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2015) reports 58% of men and 57% of women completing a minimum of high school education and 58% of adults aged 25-64 completing upper secondary education.

Examining political ideology of respondents, exactly half of respondents consider themselves to be neutral on a scale from very left to very right. Within the remaining half, 28% appear to be left and 15% consider themselves right. Very few affiliated with being in either extreme.

The final demographic information requested was whether or not their nationality was Chilean. Those answering yes, which was 80% of respondents, were then forwarded to the open ended questions and those answering no, 20%, were finished with the survey. This was done to only take in account a more detailed response of only those who are Chilean.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Given the strong patriarchal history within Chile, there is reason to believe there would be some ties to the conservative traditions, but since their current president is female and serving her second term, there are eligible Chilean voters who support the role of women within government. The first three questions in the survey were statements about the role of women and respondents were able to answer based on a five-level Likert scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree.
1. Women's roles should be in both the family and/or public sector—implying there are no restrictions to roles.
2. Women's roles should be in the family sector, i.e. stay at home mother/wife—implying women are restricted to traditional roles.

   3.   Women's roles should be in the public sector, i.e. mayor, congresswoman, president—implying women should overcome the traditional roles.

The responses for the first statement were skewed towards strongly agree (80%) and agree (15%) with only eight respondents selecting neutral and four respondents selecting disagree. Breaking this statement down in terms of respondents' demographic information, there are no obvious trends amongst demographic groups, therefore suggesting that respondents are supportive of women working in both the public and private sector. Figure 1 shows the responses to question one based on the different demographic information. Strongly agree and agree were widely selected amongst the different demographics. The data for the second statement was strongly skewed towards strongly disagree (81%) and disagree (14%) and similarly, there were no significant difference when it was divided into demographic factors. For the third statement, respondents tended to respond in either strong agreement (88%) or agreement (12%) and again, there were no significant differences between the demographic factors. This being said, we can draw from the data that Chileans are supportive of women occupying roles in both the public and private sector and there does not appear to be differences amongst men and women, age, level of education, and political affiliation.
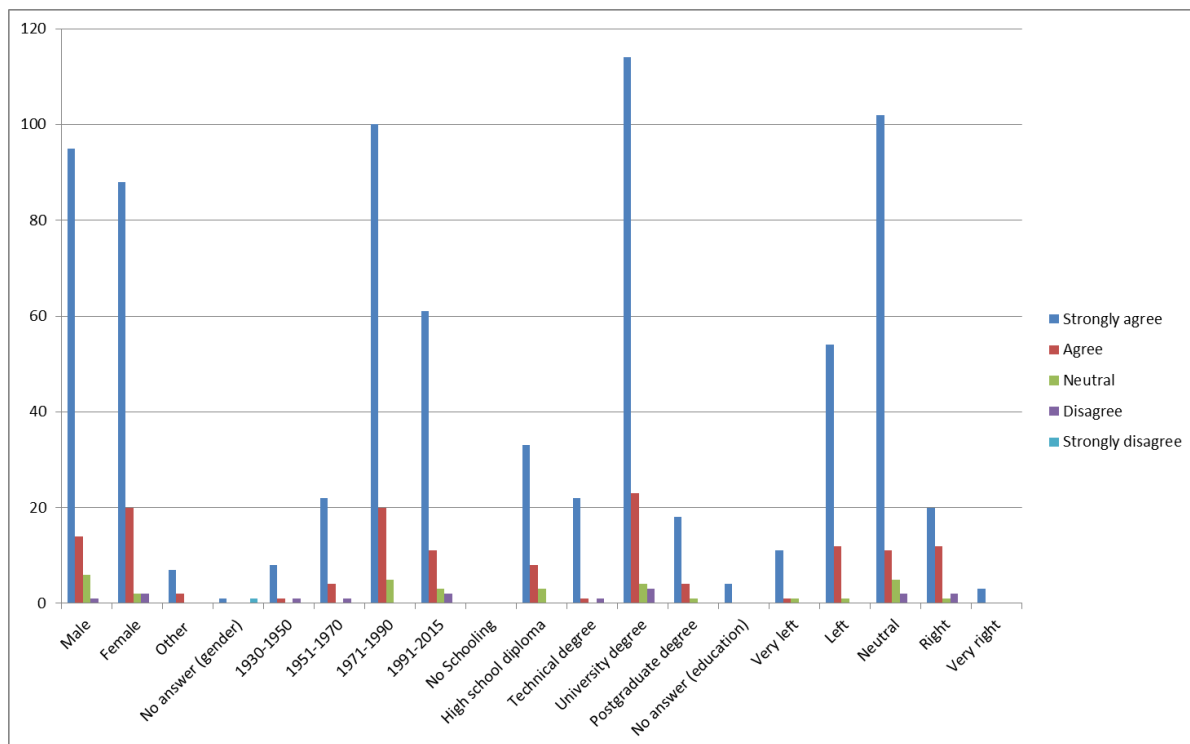

Figure 1. "Women's roles should be in both the family and/or public sector."

     Further, the open ended question "What is the role of women in society? For example, should women be mothers and/or housewives or should women lead the country?" supports the previous trend. The responses to this question were broken down into six different categories:

   1.   Women should fulfill whichever role they desire as they are equal to men. Roles are not confined to one's gender, but only capabilities, availability, vocation, preparation, etc. Some noted in their responses, however, as a mother, certain roles come with that position, but that does not mean one is confined to solely maternal roles.

   2.   Women should fulfill maternal and domestic roles, also noting the perceived tendency that women are too emotional and thus incapable to lead a country.

   3.   Women are versatile and should fulfill multiple roles, but traditionally, roles were more restricted. Today women have demonstrated their importance and desire to be equal; thus, roles are changing and less restricting.

   4.   Women have the ability to fulfill whichever role, but Chile is a macho society and societal attributes contribute greatly to roles. Some respondents in this category further stated, equality has yet to be achieved

completely and even women who have broken past confining barriers and assumed a position of power are not necessarily equal, for example, the wage gap.

5. Acknowledging that women should fulfill whichever role they desire, men and society need to balance roles more and more, especially in the case of being a caretaker.
6. Women should lead the nation. Some stated this as both men and women should lead.

In Figure 2, the distribution of responses is shown. The responses are significantly skewed towards the belief that women should fulfill whichever role they desire (number 1). Those supporting that women should fulfill traditional roles (number 2) were minimal. Even though the other statements were marginal, they were divided because it is significant that some respondents acknowledged confined gender roles in the past—limiting women's representation in government—and that the Chilean society has macho roots, meaning power and dominance associated with the male gender. These are both significant societal factors contributing to women's representation and relating to the previous literature.
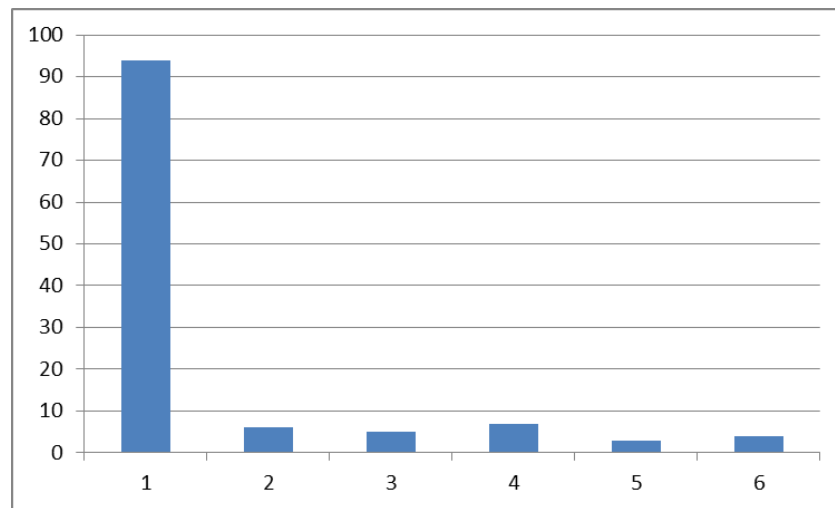

Figure 2. Coded responses to "What is the role of women in society?"

For example, one respondent stated,

> I am not for agreeing with defined gender roles, a woman should have freedom to do what she wants; in [question one] they are able to be both, [a mother/housewife and/or public official], depending on each woman. Personally I do not go to the two extremes in the answer, I respect the right to choose each…I disagree that a man is working and that a woman washes the dishes and keeps the house in order. The work should be fair and free without being subject to certain gender roles or tasks.

This statement further demonstrates that respondents support women choosing their career whether it be within the home or within the public sector. This statement also contributes to the idea that men have the same choice—to work within the home or public—and roles should not be restricted based on gender supporting the conclusion that respondents favor the participation of both genders within government. Further, the second open ended statement, "What is the role of men in society? For example, should men be fathers/housekeepers or should they lead the country?" received similar responses. One responded as follows, "The role of men has been more determined by macho concepts established historically…however; this should change and favor gender diversity." This statement reiterates the macho roots Chile is historically known to have, but acknowledges the desire for change and increased gender diversity.

Conversely, responses taking the traditional views of gender indicated, for example, "Women should work equal to men, but are not empowered/entitled to make important decisions, let alone run a country, they have very strong emotions and that makes it difficult to make urgent decisions with a cool head." Other responses simply stated "housewife" or addressed that it is the duty of women to support the family and men by fulfilling domestic roles.
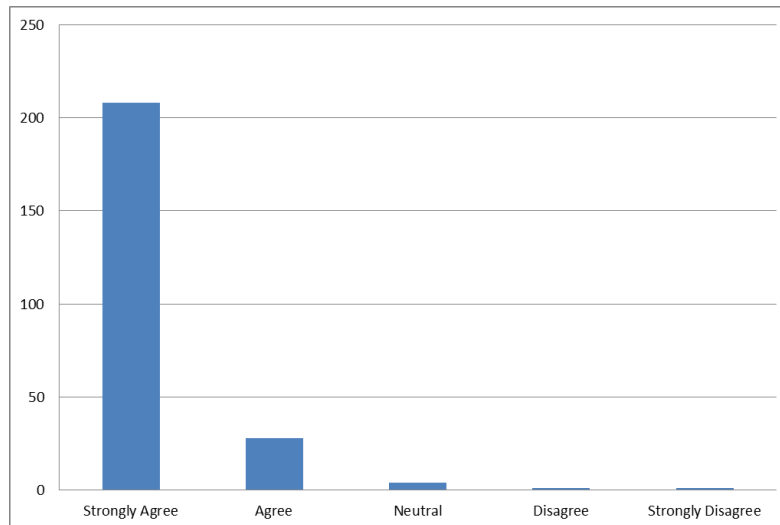
Another statement testing the perspective of women in government stated, "If a candidate is qualified in terms of education and/or experience, I would vote for that candidate regardless of gender." Again, respondents were able to answer based on the Likert scale and the responses were skewed towards strongly agree (85%) with only a few

choosing the other options (See Figure 3). While respondents appear to be supportive of women occupying all roles, they also do not appear to have a visible bias against either gender. This was further tested in the open ended questions asking, "What factors influence your decision when voting?" Typical responses ranged from political party or affiliation, political ideas and change, and positive traits such as, but not limited to honesty, credibility, and capability. The term "gender" and "women" were mentioned minimally and only within the context of voting independent from gender, not discriminating against gender, voting for women as long as one's ideas are still represented or in order to aid in increasing women's representation in politics, and voting for a candidate who advocated towards promoting women's representation.

Figure 3. "If a candidate is qualified in terms of education and/or experience, I would vote for that candidate regardless of gender."

   In terms of whether or not respondents believe the Chilean government promotes or does not promote women's representation, this is difficult to draw a collective opinion. Of the total responses, 9% of respondents strongly agreed and 40% of respondents agreed that the Chilean government promotes women's representation (See Figure 4). Nearly 38% of respondents felt neutral towards this statement. Few respondents strongly disagreed (2%) or disagreed (12%).
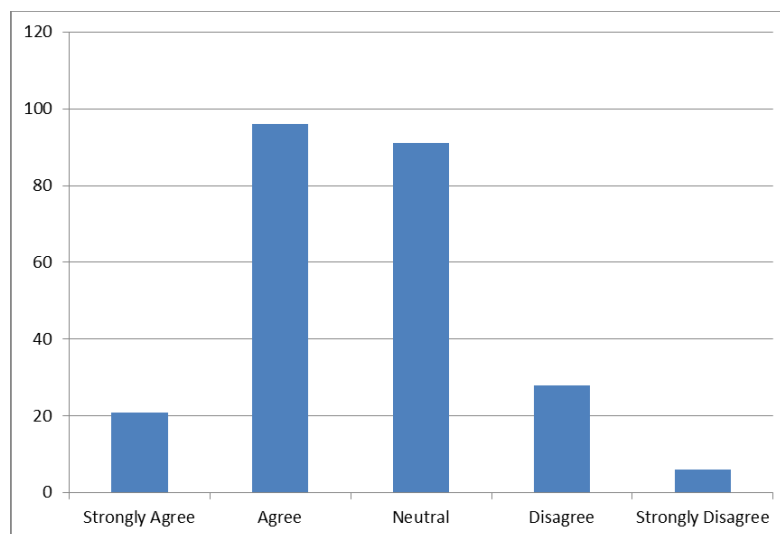

Figure 4. "The Chilean government promotes women's representation."

As this data was broken down into results based on demographic information, there were no significant trends (See Table 2). More women than men strongly agreed and agreed with the statement and more men than women responded neutral. The high amount of respondents answering neutral to this statement may suggest the lack of consideration of their government's promotion on women's representation. Noted from an informal interview with a Chilean working in a relatively new ministry is that acknowledgment towards gender disparity and women's involvement within government is a rather new realization. Within relatively newer ministries, women have obtained more jobs than older ministries (Male Participant, 28 years of age). This suggests that across all aspects of government, this is not a common trend or a common consideration. There may be a generational gap and as previously noted, the sample size lacked some diversity regarding age.

Table 2. The Chilean government promotes women's representation

		Strongly agree	*Agree*	*Neutral*	*Disagree*	*Strongly disagree*
Gender	Women	9	56	32	13	2
	Men	9	37	52	14	4
	Other	3	2	4		
	Prefer not to answer		1		1	
Year Born	1930 -1950	2	4	3	1	
	1951-1970	4	16	3	1	4
	1971-1990	13	52	41	17	2
	1991-2 015	2	24	41	7	3
	Prefer not to answer					
Level of Education	No Schooling					
	High school diploma or the equivalent	2	11	25	5	1
	Technical degree	5	13	4	1	1
	University degree	74		50		3
	Postgraduate degree	2	9	8	3	1
	Prefer not to answer	1		1	2	
Political Ideology	Very left	2	5	3	3	
	Left	4	24	30	8	1
	Neutral	12	52	42	9	5
	Right	2	14	12	7	
	Very right	1		1	1	

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, upon understanding the historical, social, and cultural background of Chile, we can see women's representation has changed through various social movements and historical periods. Within the past half century, Chile's government endured a series of transformations from a socialist government to military dictatorship to today, a democracy. According to current data, women's representation at the national and local level in terms of female senators, deputies, and mayors is significantly low, but they have elected a female president for two presidential terms creating a unique dichotomy between women's representation within the different levels of government.

Further taking into consideration the theoretical framework which stems from the roles of political parties and candidate selection, ingrained social norms, and electoral laws, we see how women's representation fits into the Chilean government as well. Chilean political elections are faced with two historical and strong political coalitions who have a certain extent of control in candidate selection and nomination. Additionally, Chile recently adopted

gender quotas, thus the potential impact is still unseen, but the research on gender quotas in different South American nations is notable. The recent implementation of a gender quota at the party level may prove to aid in balancing the representation between genders within the next decades. As Chile is known as one of the most traditional countries in Latin America, elaboration on the extent in which socialized gender norms are ingrained within the Chilean culture contributes greatly to the presence or lack thereof women in politics and the Chilean government. With the organization of previous literature on these aspects of women's representation in politics and government, we begin to see how women's representation in Chile is at the level it is today.

Based on the ethnographic research and cross sectional survey collected in Chile, this research suggests that based on the respondents, there does not appear to be a gender bias towards women's representation in government and politics proving the hypothesis false. Respondents tended to respond favorably towards both men and women being equally represented in the political realm. Some respondents acknowledged the historical past rooted in a patriarchy and the need for increased representation of women in government and politics. It is to be noted too, that considering women in government and politics may be a relatively new way of thinking.

LIMITATIONS

Greater diversity amongst age would draw clearer distinctions between generations and would aid in understanding if there is a generational divide—determining to what extent women's representation is a relatively new issue. For even further advancement, utilizing more quantitative data analysis would be desirable to determine statistical significance.

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