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The Gender Gap in Politics in Guatemala: 20 Years of Advances and Setbacks

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Executive Summary. This *Insights* report examines the gender gap in politics in Guatemala using data gathered over the past 20 years. We find significant improvements in certain areas: overall participation in politics has increased, with both men and women perceiving greater levels of freedom to exercise their political rights. Despite these advances, a gender gap still exists. Women have substantially lower levels of political participation than men, and feel less free to vote, participate in community groups, join demonstrations, and, in particular, run for office. These differences in perceived freedom, then, suggest that much more work needs to be done in Guatemala before gender equality in politics can be achieved.

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The Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) has been conducting surveys in Guatemala on a regular basis since 1993. The 2012 survey represented the tenth study carried out in the country during that period, a milestone in LAPOP's history.¹ This *Insights* report examines these rich data to focus on trends in the development of women's political rights and political participation in the country. We find evidence of progress but also many indications that women are still unequal participants in Guatemala's democracy.²

I. Democracy in Guatemala

Electoral democracy in Guatemala began in 1985, when the first civilian president in decades was elected (Azpuru et. al 2007).³ Though free, fair and competitive elections are an essential aspect of any conception of democracy (Dahl 1971, Diamond and Lipset 1989) most scholars emphasize that for democracy to deepen within a society, all citizens' political rights must be respected, with inclusion and equality of rights to participate as a *sine qua non* condition of any democracy (Przeworski 1991, Diamond 1999). In Guatemala, as in many other emerging democracies, a reduction in the gender gap in political participation has become a critical marker for evaluating that country's democratization process. Taking advantage of the nearly two decades of LAPOP survey data from Guatemala, this report offers an assessment of progress and remaining

¹ Funding for the 2012 round mainly came from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Important sources of support were also the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), and Vanderbilt University. In the case of Guatemala, USAID has consistently supported the project since 1993.

² Prior issues in the *Insights* Series can be found at <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/insights.php>. On the topic of women's political participation in the Americas see *Insights* number 78.

The data on which they are based can be found at <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/survey-data.php>

³ Some scholars consider that democracy did not take hold in Guatemala until after the Peace Accords were signed in 1996, but formal democracy began with the election of Vinicio Cerezo in 1985.

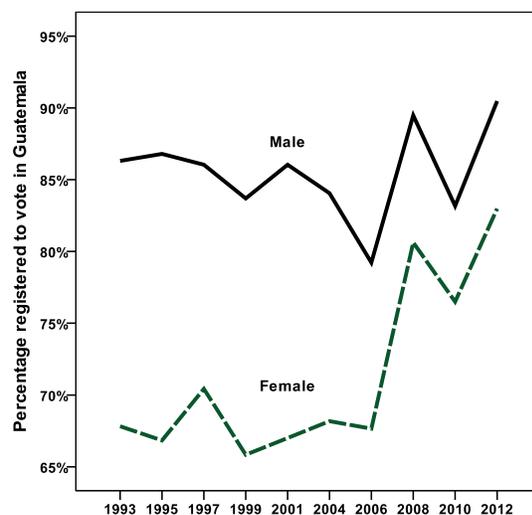
challenges the country faces in working toward gender equality in politics.

A Gender Gap in Voting?

The 1985 Guatemalan Constitution specifically recognizes full equality of opportunity and responsibility for men and women (Article 4). In turn Article 136 stipulates full equality in terms of citizens' participation in politics, from voting to running for office. In theory, then, gender equality in politics has been a founding principle of Guatemala's democracy since its inception. However, tremendous disparities in participation rates and views on political freedoms have persisted between men and women since we began collecting data in the early 1990s.

As we can see in Figure 1, women have always trailed men in terms of their voter registration rates, even though men and women have the same opportunity to register upon reaching the age of 18. We see from this figure, though, that the gap in registration rates has improved substantially over the past twenty years, with the 2012 gap a mere 6 percentage points.

Figure 1. Gender Gap in Voter Registration 1993-2012

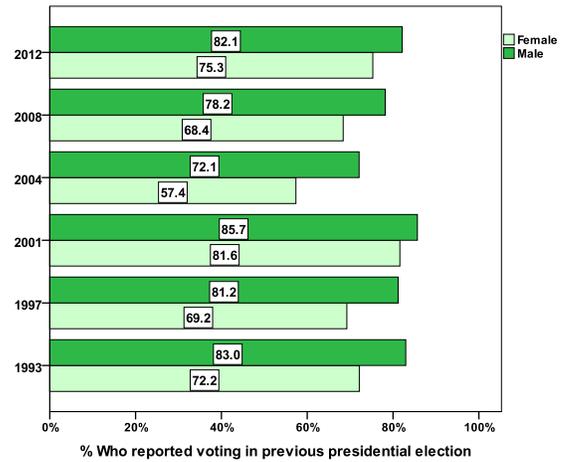


Source: © AmericasBarometer, Guatemala

In an effort to better understand who registers to vote and why some Guatemalans do not, we ran a multivariate analysis in order to examine the socioeconomic and demographic determinants of voter registration. Figure 2 displays the results of this analysis, revealing that women, younger Guatemalans, and those with darker skin color are all less likely to register.⁴

Respondents who indicated that they were registered to vote were then asked if they had voted in the (first round) of the previous presidential election. Figure 3 shows only those years in which the survey was administered within two years (or less) of a presidential election in order to minimize misreporting.⁵ In this figure, the participation gap between men and women is clear, but again, we see an improvement over time—in 1993 the gap was over 10%, but by 2012 had dropped to 6.8%. The difference in turnout rates among men and women, though, remains statistically significant for all years.

Figure 3. Voter Turnout by Gender in Guatemala (First round, in year closest after presidential election)

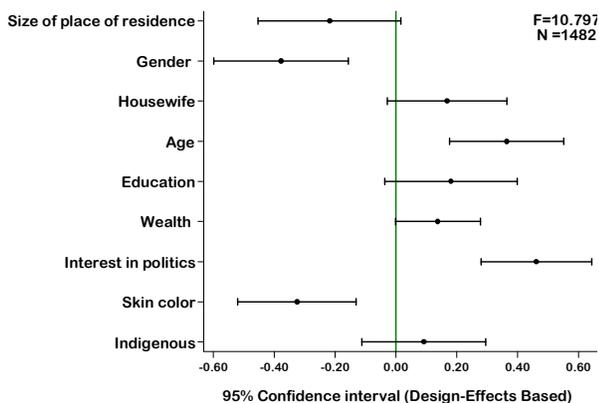


Source: © AmericasBarometer, Guatemala

Gaps in the Perception of Freedom to Exercise Political Rights

Beyond casting a vote, it is important to examine whether Guatemalan citizens feel equally free to exercise their political rights, or whether the gender gap we see in participation also exists in the extent to which men and women perceive themselves to be free to participate in their political system. Such perceptions of political freedom can be critical in understanding why some individuals choose to participate in politics. Do Guatemalan women feel as if they are fully free to participate in politics in any way they wish or do they perceive the political playing field to be uneven? A series of questions tapping this issue have been asked in Guatemala since 1993.⁶ The questions ask if respondents feel free to vote, to participate in groups to solve

Figure 2. Determinants of Voter Registration in Guatemala in 2012



Source: © AmericasBarometer 2012

⁴ The graph shows standardized coefficients (dots) from a logistic regression analysis, with the horizontal lines capturing the 95% confidence interval for the estimated coefficient.

⁵ The presidential elections included would be those of Jorge Serrano in 1991, Álvaro Arzú in 1995, Alfonso Portillo in 1999, Oscar Berger in 2003, Álvaro Colom in 2007 and Otto Pérez Molina in 2011.

⁶If you decided to participate in the activities that I will mention, would you do it without fear, with some fear or with a lot of fear

DER1. Participate in solving community problems.

DER2. Vote in a national election.

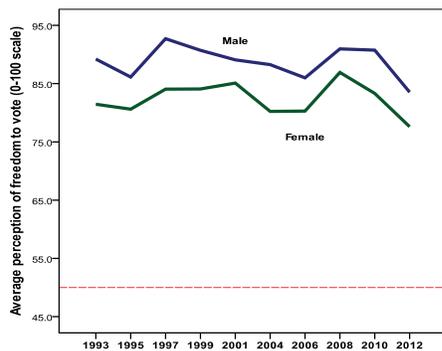
DER3. Participate in a peaceful demonstration.

DER4. Run for office.

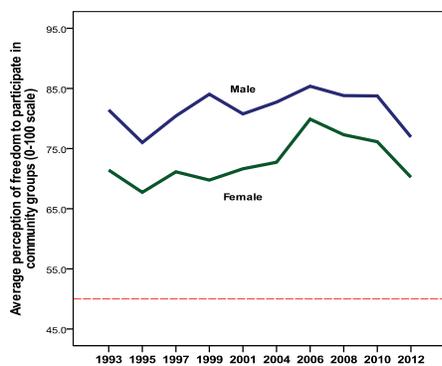
community problems, to participate in a peaceful demonstration, and to run for office. Responses were recoded into a 0-100 scale, with a score of 100 representing those individuals with no fear of participating (a high level of perceived freedom) and 0 those with a lot of fear of participating in politics. Figures 4 and 5 show the results. In all cases a reference line has been drawn at the 50-point mark.

Three general findings emerge from these figures. First it is evident that the gender gap exists across all the distinct forms of participation rights. These differences are all statistically significant and suggest a widespread tendency among women to be more hesitant about engaging in politics than their male counterparts.

Figure 4. Perception of Freedom to Vote and to Participate in Community Groups (1993-2012)



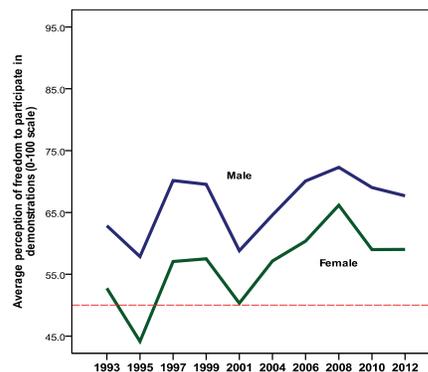
Source: © Americas Barometer, Guatemala



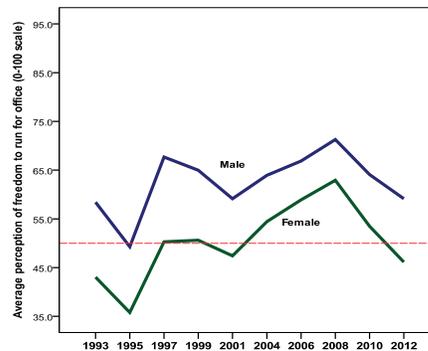
Source: © AmericasBarometer, Guatemala

Secondly, this gap is particularly notable in areas of participation such as joining a demonstration or running for office. The perception of freedom to vote and the perception of freedom to participate in groups have consistently been higher over the years than the freedom to demonstrate and to run for office.

Figure 5. Perception of Freedom to Participate in Demonstrations and to Run for Office (1993-2012)



Source: ©AmericasBarometer, Guatemala



Source: © AmericasBarometer, Guatemala

Finally, despite the persistence of the gap between males and females along these dimensions, over the past twenty years a general trend of increased feelings of political freedoms for all Guatemalans has emerged. Though this trend reversed somewhat in 2012 more data are necessary to determine if this decline represents a reversal of the longer term positive movement in perceived political freedoms.

Differences among Women

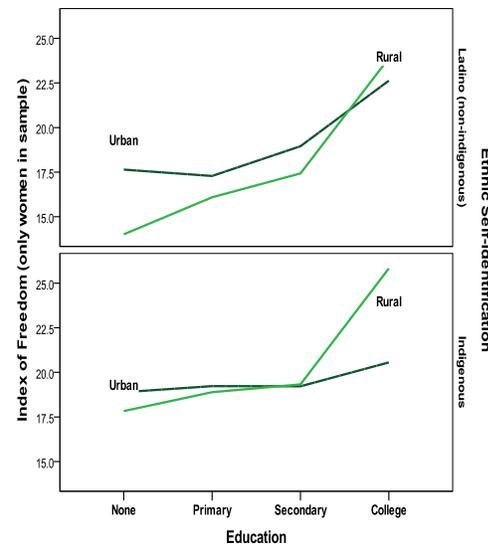
Further analysis of the data allows us to explore those factors that help explain which women tend to feel more freedom to participate in politics. We create a summary index of freedom by adding together responses to the four political rights items mentioned above⁷. When a regression analysis of the 2012 data (Table 2 in the Appendix) is performed only using women in the sample, one can see that important differences emerge: women with more education and those who live in larger cities are more likely to perceive higher levels of freedom to exert their political rights. Interestingly, indigenous women also emerge as more likely to feel free to participate in politics than their non-indigenous counterparts. Age and wealth do not appear to be significant predictors of the perception of freedom among women.

Figure 6 displays some of those differences in the perception of freedom among Guatemalan women. Among non-indigenous women, those living in urban areas are more likely to feel freer; but education levels play a significant role as well. In both in urban and rural areas, women with higher levels of education are more likely to feel free to participate in politics than women with lower levels of education. In fact there is virtually no difference among educated women who live in rural areas and those who live in urban areas. Given the conventional view that individuals in rural areas tend to be less engaged with politics, this finding suggests the power of education to bridge that urban-rural divide in political attitudes and behaviors, at least among women.

Women now vote almost as much as men, but women are still at disadvantage in several aspects, including the perception of freedom to participate in politics.

⁷ The higher numbers represent more perception of freedom.

Figure 6. Differences in the Perception of Freedom Among Women in Guatemala in 2012



Source: © AmericasBarometer by LAPOP, 2012

With regards to indigenous women, the impact of education is only evident in rural areas. For indigenous women living in urban areas there is only a slight increase in the perception of freedom for those with some college education compared to those with less education. In rural areas, however, having a secondary education, and particularly some college education, has an important influence in terms of the perception of freedom. Educated indigenous women living in rural areas are significantly more likely to feel free to exercise their political rights than their less educated counterparts. Indeed, when compared to other groups of women, college-educated indigenous women living in rural areas of Guatemala have the highest average perception of freedom. The detailed results can be seen in Table 4 in the Appendix.

Again, these findings suggest the great potential of continued advances in Guatemala's education system, among other benefits, to bridge the gender gap in political engagement that has characterized the country since the arrival of democracy.

Conclusion

This *Insights* report has examined the gender gap in politics in Guatemala. We see that across the board there have been improvements overtime – men and women in Guatemala now participate more in politics than in the past and perceive greater levels of freedom to exercise their political rights.

We also see, however, that there have existed, and still remain, important differences between males and females in the country, with women showing lower levels of participation and perceived political freedom. One point of optimism from this report concerns the role of education in bridging this political participation gap. If we accept that this gender divide in politics is an obstacle for the deepening of democracy in Guatemala, then the strides made by educated women in both the urban and rural sectors of the country to participate more and feel more comfortable with such participation suggest that continued advances in the education of women are necessary for advancing Guatemalan democracy as well.

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Appendix

Table 1. Logistic Regression for Predicting Voter Registration in Guatemala in 2012

	<i>Coefficient</i>	<i>Standard Error</i>
Indigenous	.1890027	.1744497
Skin color	-.253901*	.0654311
Interest in politics	.0160923*	.0033209
Wealth	.0957542	.0653071
Education	.0384025	.0236482
Age	.2428192*	.0634747
Housewife	.4198604	.2260846
Woman	-.7538597*	.1852908
Size of place of residence	-.1338667*	.0597592
Constant	2.332902	.5412341

Note: Coefficients are statistically significant at ** p<0.05.

Table 2. Regression for Predicting the Index of Perception of Freedom for Women in Guatemala in 2012

	<i>Coefficient</i>	<i>Standard Error</i>
Age	.134	.224
Education	1.531*	.499
Indigenous	2.492*	.695
Size of place of residence	.626*	.206
Wealth	-.048	.246
Constant	14.215*	1.203

Note: Coefficients are statistically significant at ** p<0.05.
Only women respondents were included in this analysis.

Table 3. ANOVA Test for Gender Gap in Politics in Guatemala

Political participation	Male	Female	Difference (Chi Square test)
<i>Registered to vote</i>			
1993	86.3 %	67.8 %	57.61*
2012	90.5 %	83.0 %	20.02*
<i>Voting turnout</i>			
1993	83.0 %	72.2 %	15.23*
2012	82.1 %	75.3 %	10.47*
Perception of freedom to exercise political rights (average 0-100 scale)	Male	Female	F-test
<i>To vote</i>			
1993	89.2	81.4	19.95*
2012	76.9	70.2	15.13*
<i>To run for office</i>			
1993	58.4	43.0	32.64*
2012	59.1	46.1	40.61*
<i>To participate in peaceful demonstrations</i>			
1993	62.9	52.7	16.57*
2012	67.6	59.0	20.80*
<i>To participate in community groups</i>			
1993	81.4	71.4	24.77*
2012	76.9	70.3	15.13*

Note: Coefficients are statistically significant at ** p<0.05.

Table 4. ANOVA Test for Differences in Perception of Freedom Among Women in Guatemala (averages in scale 0-40)

Gender Group	Average Perceived Freedom (0-40)
<i>Ethnic Self-Identification*</i>	
Indigenous women	18.97
Ladino women (non-indigenous)	17.88
<i>Education*</i>	
None	17.18
Primary	17.54
Secondary	18.76
College	23.05
<i>Size of Residence*</i>	
Capital (Guatemala City)	20.24
Large city	18.30
Medium city	17.07
Small city	17.67
Rural area	17.68
<i>Age</i>	
18-25	17.90
26-35	19.35
36-45	17.42
46-55	19.15
56-65	18.11
66 +	15.66
<i>Wealth</i>	
First quintile	17.21
Second quintile	19.66
Third quintile	18.48
Fourth quintile	17.94
Fifth quintile (wealthier)	18.46

Note: Coefficients are statistically significant at ** p<0.05.